PlayStation 3 PlayStation Portable PlayStation Network PlayStation 2

PlayStation®

The Official Magazine

JUNE 2010

ONE PRINCE TO RULE YOUR SUMMER

The game. The movie. Royal secrets revealed.

SLICE, DICE, SNIPE
Hands-on with Dead Space 2, Mafia II, and Ghost Recon

REVIEWS APLENTY
Dragons, dots, death, and cake

SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV
Beat the *%@# out of anyone

SHAKE IT, BABY!
Everything you need to know about PS3 motion control

HEAVY RAIN

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 33 (June 2010)

PRINCE OF PERSIA

Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

Wanna play games for a living? No, no you don't. It actually sucks. p.60

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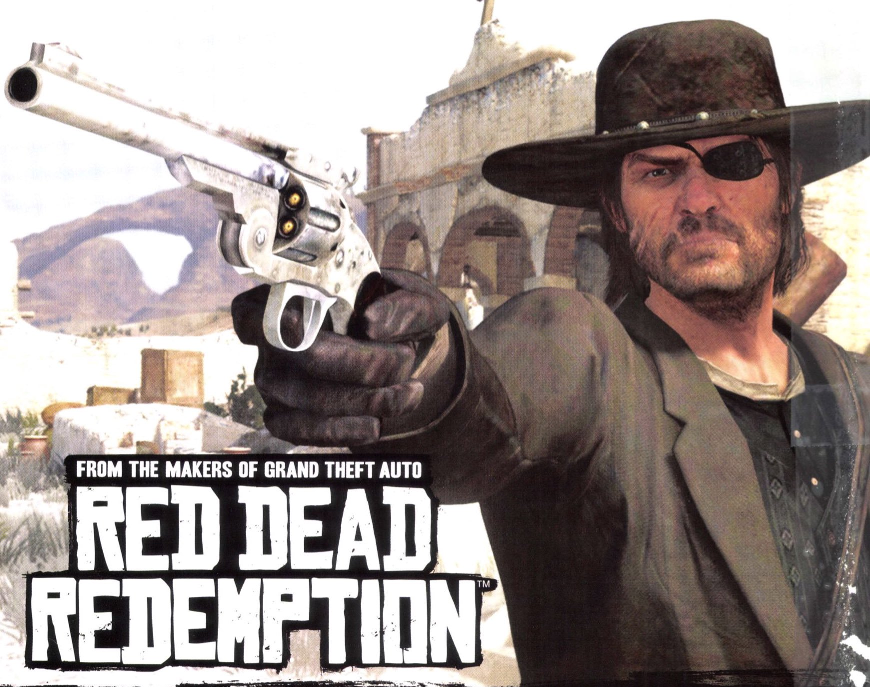
JUNE 2010



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XBOX 360. XBOX LIVE. PS3 PlayStation 3 PlayStation Network

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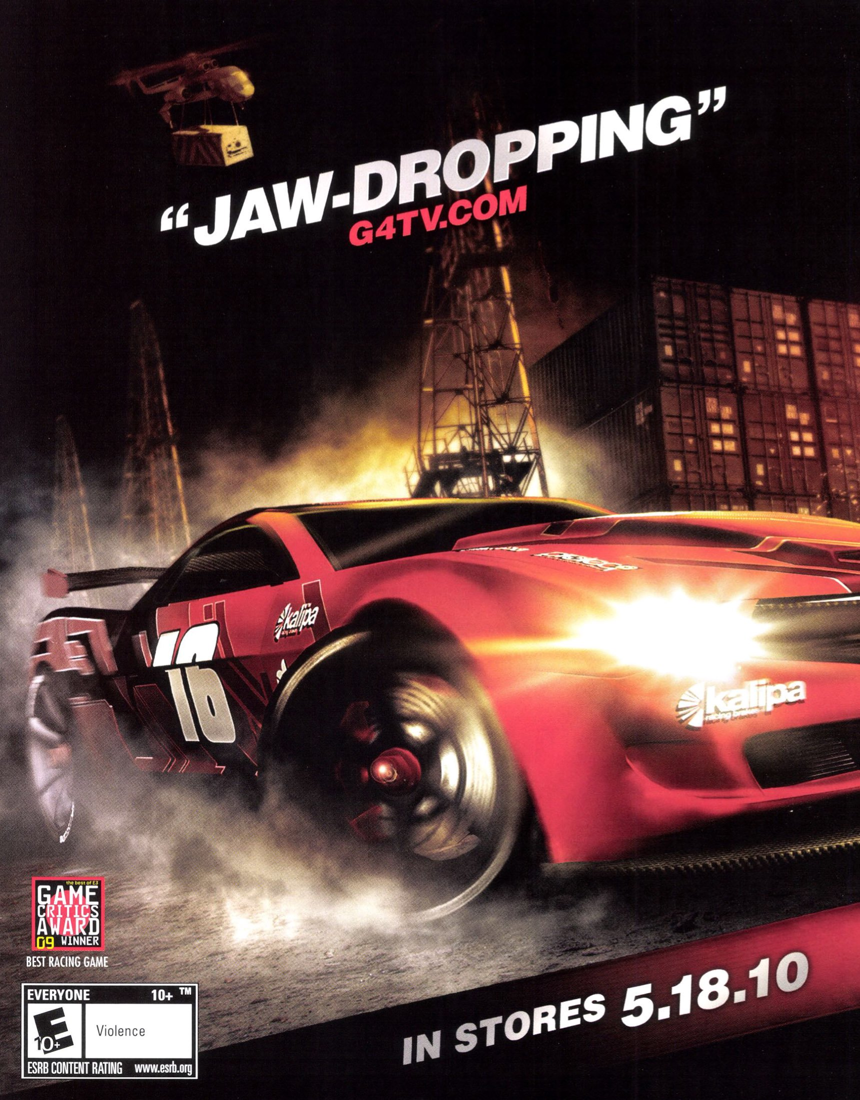
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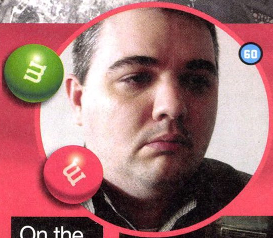

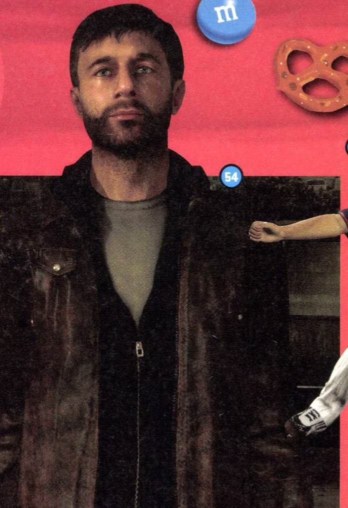

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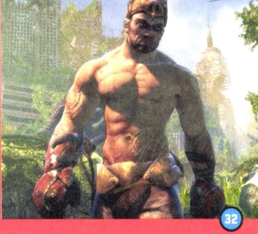

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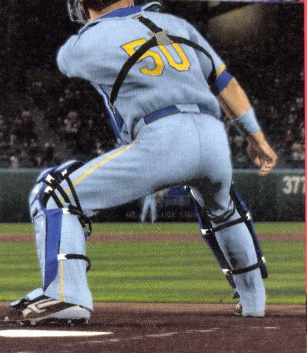

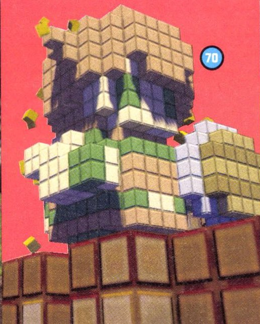

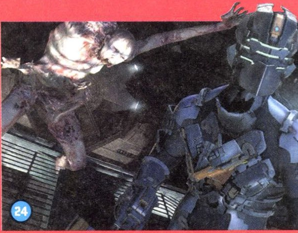

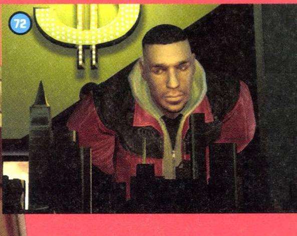

→ Reign Supreme

Used to be that games were desperate to be associated with Hollywood. I should know. I've been doing this long enough that I remember a time when we in the magazine business would chase after any C-list pseudo celeb just to ask him if he plays games. And we weren't alone. Anyone who recalls the swirl of publicity around the PS2 launch will remember all the red-carpet events and celebrity parties Sony was throwing, just to get its system in front of all those pretty people.

My, how times change. A decade later and it's no longer a big deal that—*gasp*—an actor enjoys some downtime with a DualShock in hand. We've all grown up with gaming, and it has long since evolved into a fully legitimate entertainment choice that appeals to everyone from the casualest of the casual to the corest of the hardcore.

Which brings us to this month's cover star: *Prince of Persia* always had the makings of an epic, summer blockbuster—and now we've got one, courtesy of epic, summer blockbuster producer Jerry Bruckheimer. A few weeks prior to the movie, though, we'll be treated to a brand-new game that, while set in the same universe as the movie, is wholly separate, having been in the works even as *Prince of Persia* 2008 was shipping to stores. It's a return to the PS2 prince that we all loved (though, for the record, I also adored the 2008 "illustrative" reboot), and it stands alone as another great chapter in this grand saga. In other words, *The Forgotten Sands* isn't a movie game, nor is *The Sands of Time* just a game movie. And we've got the inside scoop on both. Awesome!

GARY

Gary Steinman | Editor in Chief
www.twitter.com/TinyManRages

The Team ↘

GARY STEINMAN
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Like some Biblical hero, Gary returned from the mountain with two tablets, which proclaimed that he does not make monkeys, he just trains them, and that he is rubber while you are some sort of gluelike substance.

NOW PLAYING: *Final Fantasy XIII, 3D Dot Game Heroes, Heavy Rain*

GREG ORLANDO
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Bitten by a radioactive spider, bathed in a gamma-ray explosion, mailed first-class from Krypton to Earth after witnessing his parents gunned down in a dark alley, Greg was found powerless. And quite dead.

NOW PLAYING: *BioShock 2, How to Train Your Dragon, Mass Effect 2*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

Ken routinely drives right by the awesome store because he already has an ample supply on hand plus some to spare. "Nope," he'll say as he rockets past the awesome store at roughly warp 6. "Full up."

NOW PLAYING: *MLB 10: The Show, 2010 FIFA World Cup*

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

Roger and son spent 145 hours to beat *LEGO Batman* and unlock its many secrets. That's some quality family time—but what's with Roger wearing a cape and threatening to punish freelancers with batarangs?

NOW PLAYING: *DOA: Paradise, Sonic & Sega Racing, LEGO Batman*

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

He was once presumed nothing more than a myth, but a recent sighting has confirmed that Scott both exists and is incredibly handsome. Meanwhile, the Easter Bunny still refuses to return our phone calls.

NOW PLAYING: *Lost Planet 2, Heavy Rain, Just Cause 2*

THE DAVID MURPHY
EDITORIAL INTERN

It may be that David "Daniel" Murphy is the finest intern ever to serve hard time in an asylum masquerading as a publishing house, or it may be the hyperbole meter is broken. Either way, he tapes stuff to the wall like a champ.

NOW PLAYING: *Prison Break, Persona 4, Indigo Prophecy*

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EDITORIAL
EDITOR IN CHIEF **Gary Steinman**
EXECUTIVE EDITOR **Greg Orlando**
MANAGING EDITOR **Roger Burchill**
ASSISTANT EDITOR **Scott Butterworth**
INTERN **David Murphy**
EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTORS **Jason D'Aprile, Russ Garbutt, Andrew Hayward, Leon Hurley, Nathan Meunier, Douglass C. Perry, Mikel Reparaz, Evan Shamoon, David F. Smith, Rob Smith, Nathan Wilson**

ART
ART DIRECTOR **Ken Bousquet**
DESIGN CONTRIBUTORS **Christin Chi, Gary Liew**
CREATIVE DIRECTOR **Chris Imlay**

BUSINESS
PUBLISHER **Kristen Salvatore**
ksalvatore@futureus.com
GROUP PUBLISHER **Kelley Corten**
kcorten@futureus.com
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR INTEGRATED SALES **Nate Hunt**
415-269-5408, nhunt@futureus.com
NATIONAL SALES MANGER – KEY ACCOUNTS **Isaac Ugay**
949-305-0767, iugay@futureus.com
REGIONAL SALES DIRECTOR **Carol Gillard**
646-723-5476, cgillard@futureus.com
REGIONAL SALES MANAGER **Rachel Campos**
650-745-9207, rcampos@futureus.com
REGIONAL SALES MANAGER **Arthur St. Germain**
650-238-2571, astgermain@futureus.com
DETROIT CONSUMER MANAGER **Alan Dickinson**
248-792-2408, alandmedia@comcast.net
ADVERTISING COORDINATOR **Heidi Hapin**
hhapin@futureus.com
SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER **Andrea Recio-Ang**
arecio-ang@futureus.com
MARKETING COORDINATOR **Allyson Kardel**
akardel@futureus.com

PRODUCTION
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR **Michael Hollister**
SENIOR PRODUCTION COORDINATOR **Larry Briseno**
PRINT ORDER COORDINATOR **Jennifer Lim**

CONSUMER MARKETING
VICE PRESIDENT/SALES & MARKETING **Rachelle Considine**
DIRECTOR CONSUMER MARKETING **Rich McCarthy**
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FUTURE US, Inc.
4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400
South San Francisco, CA 94080
www.futureus.com

PRESIDENT **John Marcom**
VICE PRESIDENT/CFO **John Sutton**
GENERAL COUNSEL **Charlotte Falla**
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FUTURE PLC
30 Monmouth St., Bath, Avon, BA1 2BW, England
Tel +44 1225 442244
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NON-EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN: Roger Parry
CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Stevie Spring
GROUP FINANCE DIRECTOR: John Bowman

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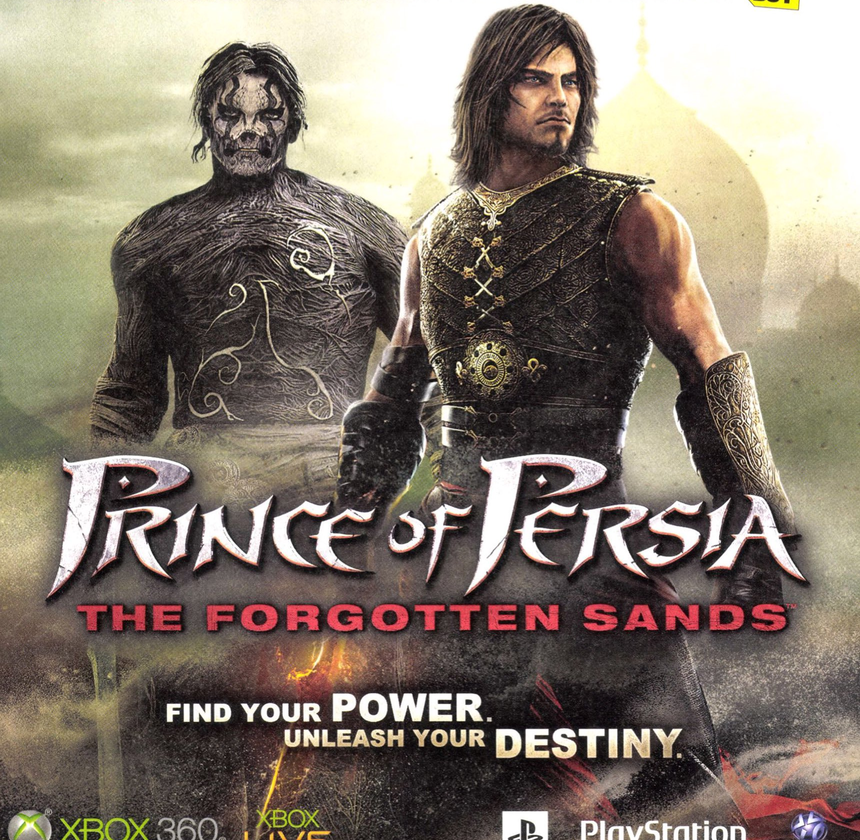

PRINCE OF PERSIA
THE FORGOTTEN SANDS™

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THE TEN

Stories that everyone's talking about

Growing Movement
Games you'll be shaking your stick at
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Death delivered faster
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Designated drivers
You decide *ModNation's* starting grid
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Moving fray
Gary and Scott gesture wildly while arguing
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1 Shake it, baby!

Sony's big Move has gamers abuzz. We've got the full report

It's accurate enough to take headshots in *SOCOM 4,* yet sensitive enough to gently lull a virtual pet to sleep. Sony recently took the wraps off Move, its big push into motion control, and the results are promising.

BLUETOOTH
Move utilizes Bluetooth wireless technology and rechargeable batteries. It also features standard DualShock-style face buttons, a Move button, and a "T" button on the back.

YOUR EYES
The PlayStation Eye camera is an essential piece of the puzzle. It films players and can put their images into gameplay.

BUNDLE
Sony promises a package that includes the Move controller, a PS Eye camera, and a yet unannounced game, all for less than $100. Other package configurations will also be available.

qore™

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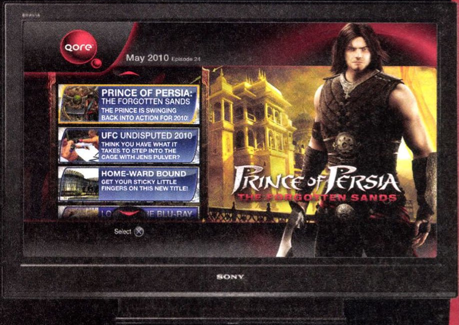
Qore host Veronica Belmont

QORE EPISODE 24

Featuring Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands, UFC Undisputed 2010, Home, and a surprise!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PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE FORGOTTEN SANDS
THE PRINCE IS SWINGING BACK INTO ACTION FOR 2010!
UFC UNDISPUTED 2010
THINK YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO STEP INTO THE CAGE WITH JENS PULVER?
HOME-WARD BOUND
GET YOUR STICKY LITTLE FINGERS ON THIS NEW TITLE!
BLU-RAY
Select
Prince of Persia
THE FORGOTTEN SANDS
SONY

We've got some stars in our eyes this month! Not only did we get to meet the drool-worthy star of *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time,* Jake Gyllenhaal, but we also got to test our skills against UFC lightweight champ Jens Pulver! Granted, maybe I'm a little more excited about the Jake thing than most of you are, but let me have my moment. There's plenty to keep everyone happy in the May episode, including a return trip to check out all the newest areas and goodies in Home, and a special surprise...

Love
Veronica

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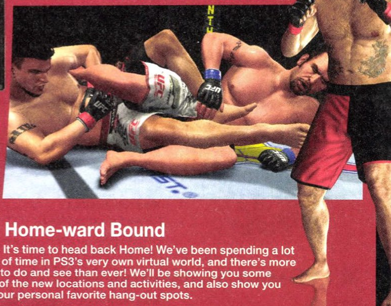
Featuring

Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands

If you thought the Prince's time-traveling tales were complete, think again! This interquel fills the seven-year gap between *The Sands of Time* and *The Two Thrones,* and ties it all together. We'll also take a look at how everything fits together with the new movie and upcoming graphic novel. That Prince is one good multitasker!

UFC Undisputed 2010

Following the success of *UFC 2009,* it's time to get back into the cage with even more famous fighters to take on! Not only do we get a chance to look at the game, but Audrey learns firsthand how tough it is to strap on a pair of those gloves. With all new modes, moves, and customizations, *Undisputed 2010* reigns supreme.



Home-ward Bound

It's time to head back Home! We've been spending a lot of time in PS3's very own virtual world, and there's more to do and see than ever! We'll be showing you some of the new locations and activities, and also show you our personal favorite hang-out spots.

And a little surprise...

We've got the first look at one of the year's hottest games—that hasn't even been *announced* yet. You won't want to miss this one.

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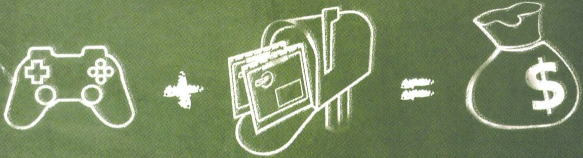

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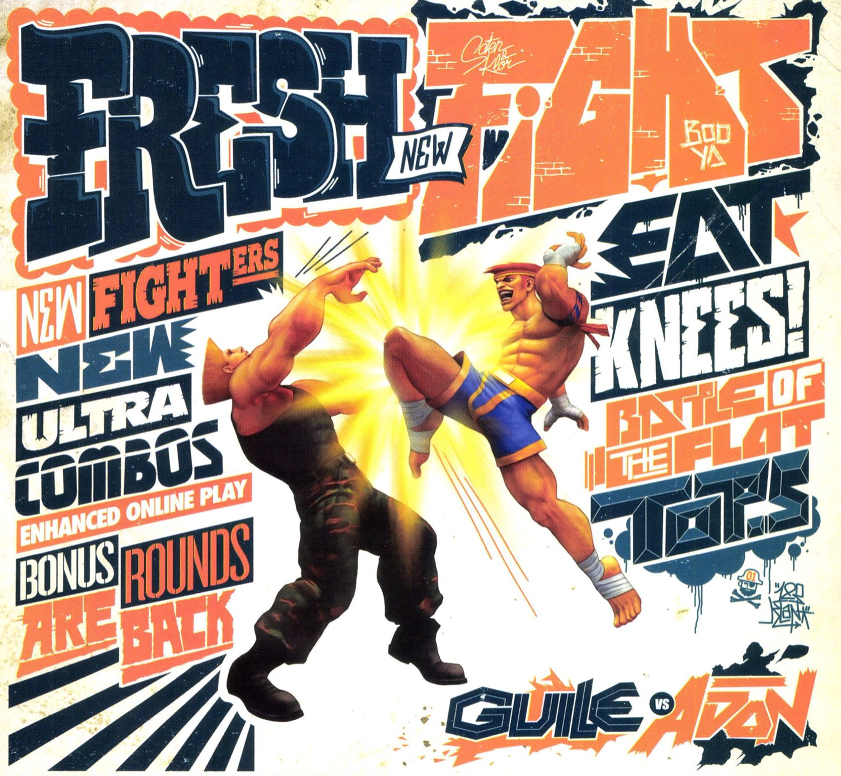
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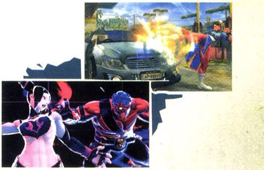

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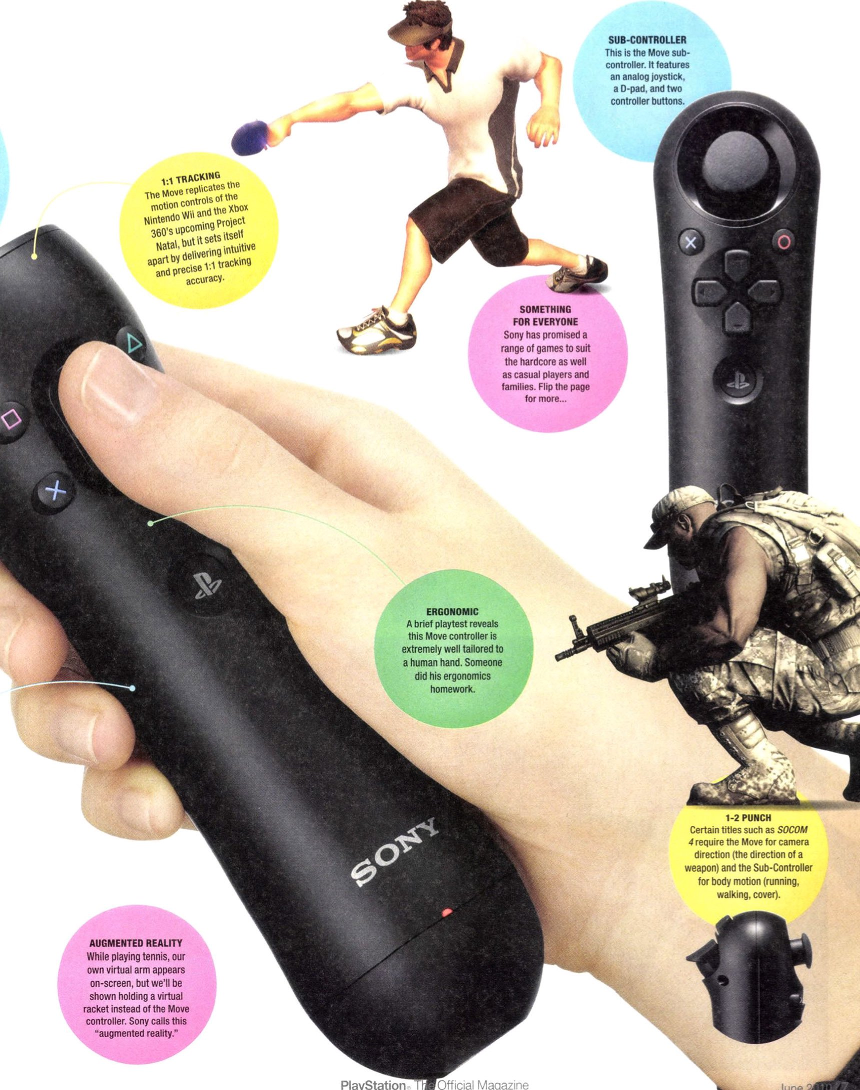


SUB-CONTROLLER
This is the Move sub-controller. It features an analog joystick, a D-pad, and two controller buttons.

1:1 TRACKING
The Move replicates the motion controls of the Nintendo Wii and the Xbox 360's upcoming Project Natal, but it sets itself apart by delivering intuitive and precise 1:1 tracking accuracy.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE
Sony has promised a range of games to suit the hardcore as well as casual players and families. Flip the page for more...

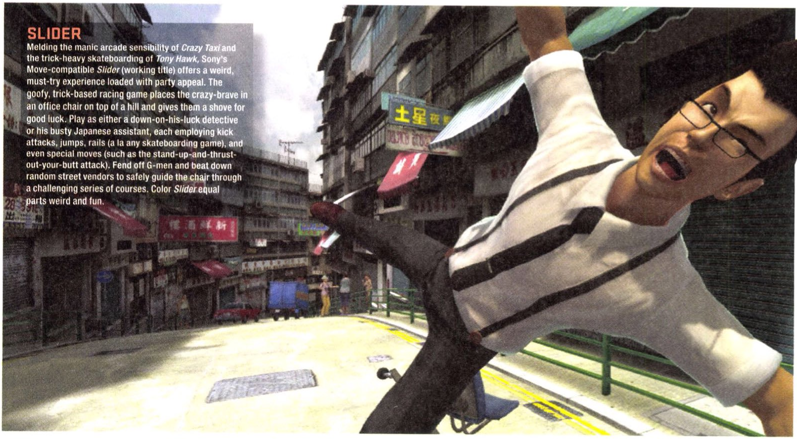
ERGONOMIC
A brief playtest reveals this Move controller is extremely well tailored to a human hand. Someone did his ergonomics homework.

1-2 PUNCH
Certain titles such as *SOCOM 4* require the Move for camera direction (the direction of a weapon) and the Sub-Controller for body motion (running, walking, cover).

AUGMENTED REALITY
While playing tennis, our own virtual arm appears on-screen, but we'll be shown holding a virtual racket instead of the Move controller. Sony calls this "augmented reality."

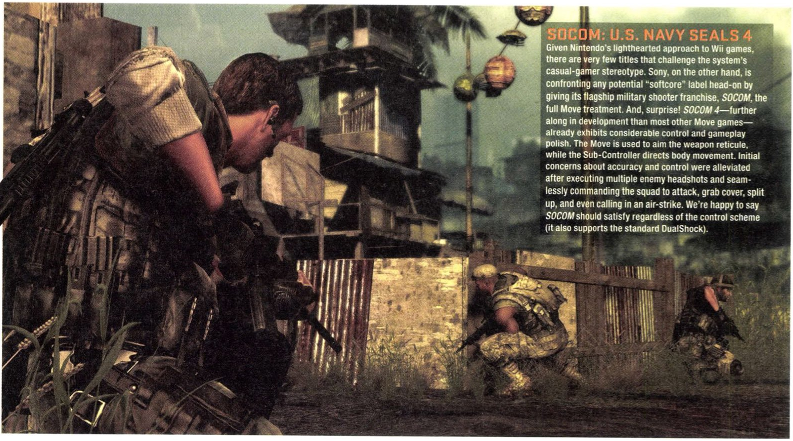
2 Games on the **Move**

From slugging street fighters to smashing ping-pong balls, the Move lineup is deep, varied, and swinging



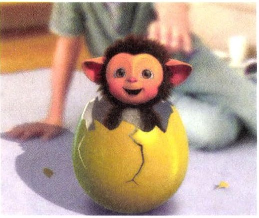
SLIDER

Melding the manic arcade sensibility of *Crazy Taxi* and the trick-heavy skateboarding of *Tony Hawk*, Sony's Move-compatible *Slider* (working title) offers a weird, must-try experience loaded with party appeal. The goofy, trick-based racing game places the crazy-brave in an office chair on top of a hill and gives them a shove for good luck. Play as either a down-on-his-luck detective or his busty Japanese assistant, each employing kick attacks, jumps, rails (a la any skateboarding game), and even special moves (such as the stand-up-and-thrust-out-your-butt attack). Fend off G-men and beat down random street vendors to safely guide the chair through a challenging series of courses. Color *Slider* equal parts weird and fun.



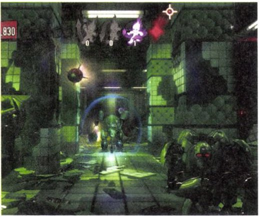
SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS 4

Given Nintendo's lighthearted approach to Wii games, there are very few titles that challenge the system's casual-gamer stereotype. Sony, on the other hand, is confronting any potential "softcore" label head-on by giving its flagship military shooter franchise, *SOCOM*, the full Move treatment. And, surprise! *SOCOM 4*—further along in development than most other Move games—already exhibits considerable control and gameplay polish. The Move is used to aim the weapon reticule, while the Sub-Controller directs body movement. Initial concerns about accuracy and control were alleviated after executing multiple enemy headshots and seamlessly commanding the squad to attack, grab cover, split up, and even calling in an air-strike. We're happy to say *SOCOM* should satisfy regardless of the control scheme (it also supports the standard DualShock).



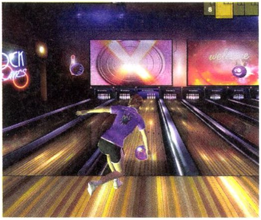
EYEPET

Released in the United Kingdom last fall, *EyePet* is another game whose looks are deceiving. It's true that the *EyePet's* saccharine-sweet appeal is all girly, cuddly, casual fun. But the monkey/dog-like creature's level of interactivity and the volume and range of its responses are remarkable. Easily the most charming choice in the initial Move lineup.



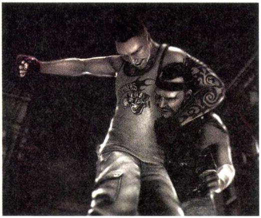
THE SHOOT

The Shoot (working title) is a rail-shooter couched in the vein of a movie production where the player is the star and the script calls for death on every page. The shooter confronts robotic creatures in a city subway, and blasts them for their failure to pay the required fare. Fail, and the movie's director calls cut. The film, which will probably be panned by internet critics, may play well in France.



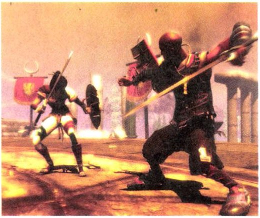
BRUNSWICK PRO BOWLING

Still early in its development (so much so that the bowling ball actually fell through the game's floor a few times), *Brunswick Pro Bowling* nonetheless blends sim-level accuracy with arcade accessibility—pick a spot on the floor, set speed and strength, then add spin—providing a level of appeal that might just make it a family-fun-night fixture. A bonus: no fetid shoes are required.



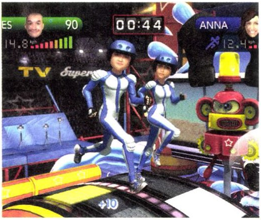
MOTION FIGHTER

Requiring two Move controllers, *Motion Fighter* (working title) demands the pugilist stand sideways to jab, stick, and, generally speaking, float like a butterfly while stinging in the manner of a bee. If an opponent gets overly aggressive, simple blocks work, but it's far more satisfying to employ a headlock and smite his stupid face with righteous fury.



SPORTS CHAMPIONS

Disc Golf, Volleyball, Archery, Table Tennis, and Bocce are included in this eclectic collection, but it's Gladiator Duel that really caught our attention. Relying on two Move controllers—one for shield, the other for a weapon—Gladiator Duel offers contests of strength and skill backed with rag-doll physics. Our fave move? Stunning an opponent and then finishing him off with a jumping death kill.



TV SUPERSTARS

If *American Gladiators* came to PS3 sporting a custom character toolset, the result would be *TV Superstars.* Utilize a simple scanning program to import your face, change hairstyles, add make-up, and then enter a slew of crazy challenges like Airheads (fling Superstar at targets) and Stunt-running (keep Superstar from getting knocked off a moving wheel). Expect silliness, insanity, and fun to ensue.

FULL SUPPORT

The list of Move game developers keeps growing

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AQ Interactive
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Atlus
Capcom
CCP
Crave Ent.
Cyberfront Corp.
Disney Int. Studios
Electronic Arts
FromSoftware
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Hudson Soft
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Koei
Konami Digital Ent.
Majesco Ent.
Marvelous Ent.
Namco Bandai
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Oxygen Games
Paon
Q Ent.
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Tecmo
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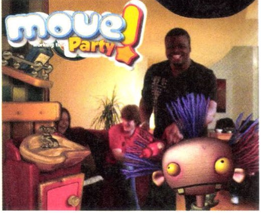
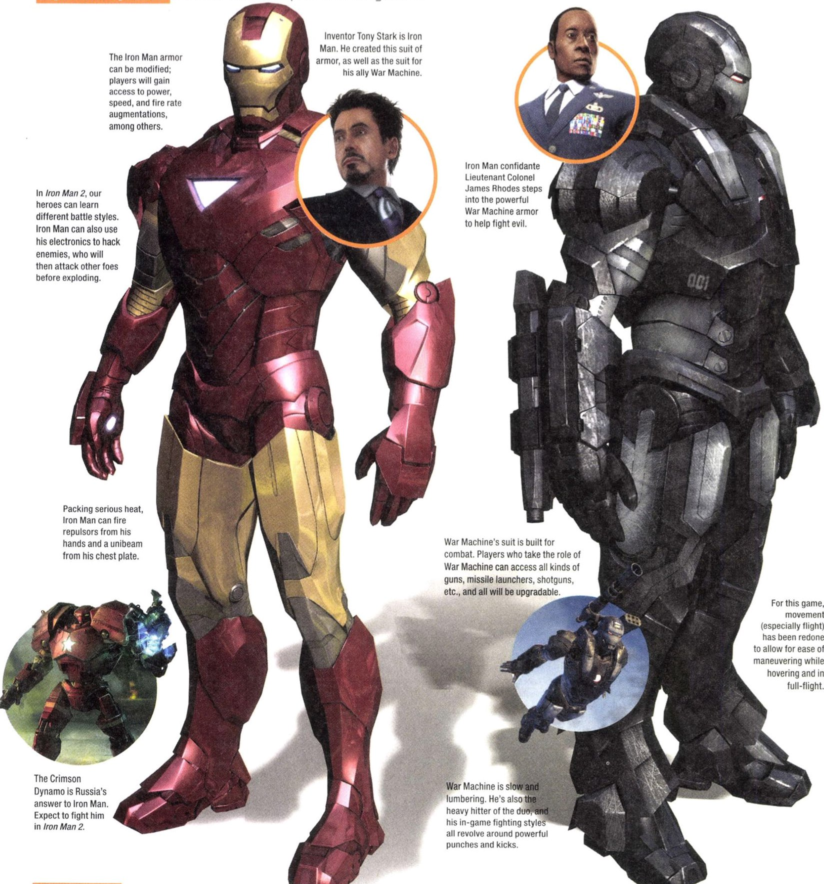


MOVE PARTY

A family/party title packed with minigames, *Move Party* (working title) uses the PS Eye to insert the player's image into a series of wacky challenges—some of which involve shaving heads, applying hair dye, and redirecting falling baby birds—while manipulating the player's on-screen image so he appears to be holding the appropriate tool (paintbrush, scissors, etc.). Novel, neato fun.



The Iron Man armor can be modified; players will gain access to power, speed, and fire rate augmentations, among others.

Inventor Tony Stark is Iron Man. He created this suit of armor, as well as the suit for his ally War Machine.

In *Iron Man 2*, our heroes can learn different battle styles. Iron Man can also use his electronics to hack enemies, who will then attack other foes before exploding.

Iron Man confidante Lieutenant Colonel James Rhodes steps into the powerful War Machine armor to help fight evil.

Packing serious heat, Iron Man can fire repulsors from his hands and a unibeam from his chest plate.

War Machine's suit is built for combat. Players who take the role of War Machine can access all kinds of guns, missile launchers, shotguns, etc., and all will be upgradable.

For this game, movement (especially flight) has been redone to allow for ease of maneuvering while hovering and in full-flight.

The Crimson Dynamo is Russia's answer to Iron Man. Expect to fight him in *Iron Man 2.*

War Machine is slow and lumbering. He's also the heavy hitter of the duo, and his in-game fighting styles all revolve around powerful punches and kicks.

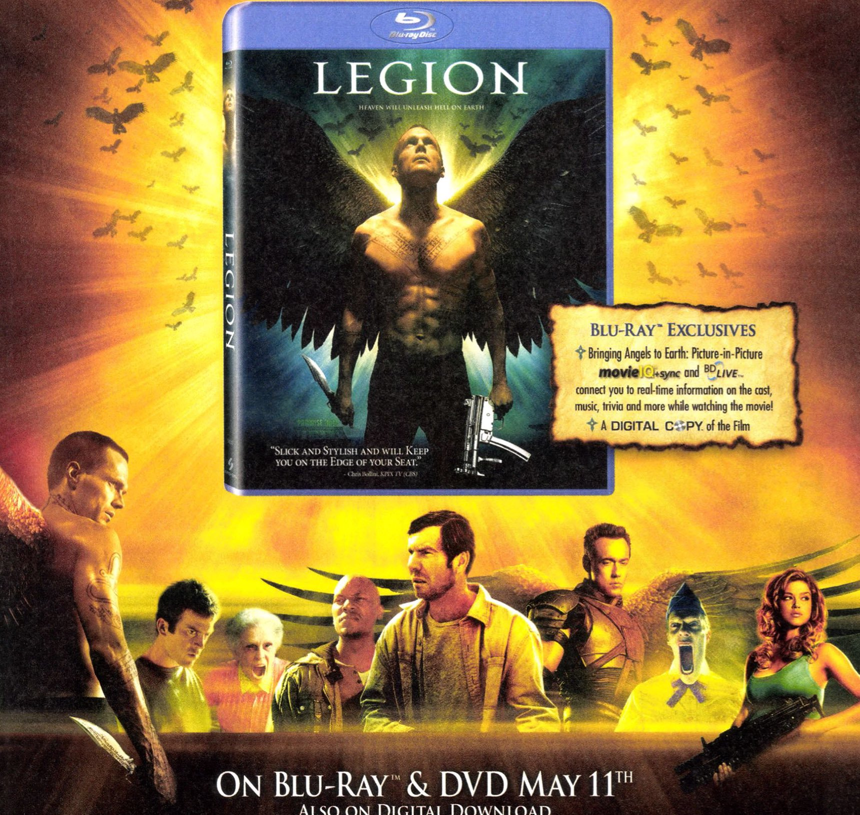
3 Business Suits

Iron Man, War Machine dress to impress in *Iron Man 2*

After a disappointing initial release, Sega is aiming to build a better Iron Man. For *Iron Man 2,* the development team worked with comic writer Matt Fraction to create an all-new story, one pitting Shellhead and his ally War Machine against a host of evil robot tanks, the criminal organization AIM (Advanced Idea Mechanics), and the villainous Crimson Dynamo.

"BULLET-BLAZING ACTION AND DEMON-KILLING SATISFACTION."

– JAMI PHILBRICK / MOVIEWEB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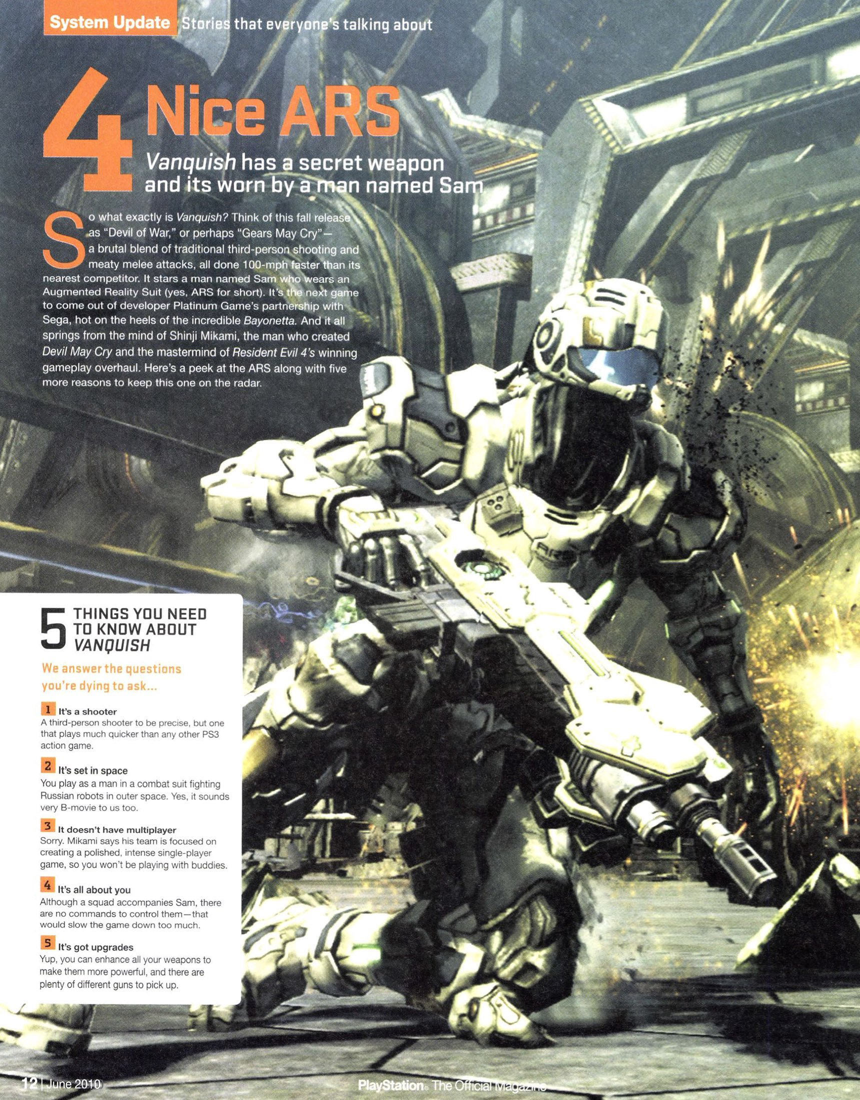
SONY PICTURES HOME ENTERTAINMENT

4 Nice ARS

Vanquish has a secret weapon and its worn by a man named Sam

So what exactly is *Vanquish?* Think of this fall release as "Devil of War," or perhaps "Gears May Cry"—a brutal blend of traditional third-person shooting and meaty melee attacks, all done 100-mph faster than its nearest competitor. It stars a man named Sam who wears an Augmented Reality Suit (yes, ARS for short). It's the next game to come out of developer Platinum Game's partnership with Sega, hot on the heels of the incredible *Bayonetta.* And it all springs from the mind of Shinji Mikami, the man who created *Devil May Cry* and the mastermind of *Resident Evil 4's* winning gameplay overhaul. Here's a peek at the ARS along with five more reasons to keep this one on the radar.



5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT *VANQUISH*

We answer the questions you're dying to ask...

1 It's a shooter
A third-person shooter to be precise, but one that plays much quicker than any other PS3 action game.

2 It's set in space
You play as a man in a combat suit fighting Russian robots in outer space. Yes, it sounds very B-movie to us too.

3 It doesn't have multiplayer
Sorry. Mikami says his team is focused on creating a polished, intense single-player game, so you won't be playing with buddies.

4 It's all about you
Although a squad accompanies Sam, there are no commands to control them—that would slow the game down too much.

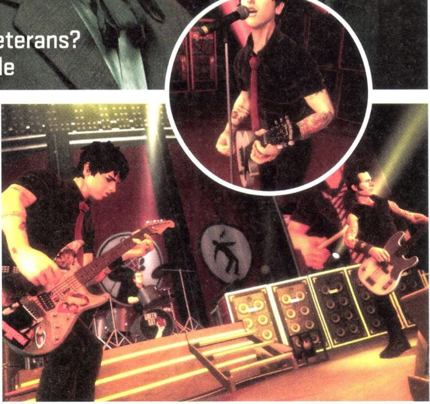
5 It's got upgrades
Yup, you can enhance all your weapons to make them more powerful, and there are plenty of different guns to pick up.

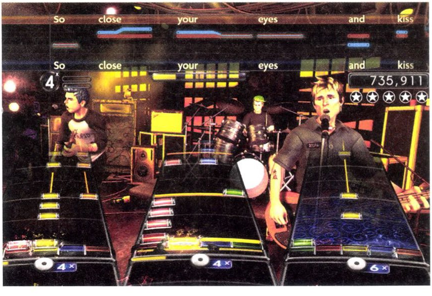
5

Green Play

Snotty punks or iconic rock 'n' roll veterans? *Green Day: Rock Band* lets *you* decide

Photo by Marina Chavez





They may just be reaching the height of their popularity now, but Green Day originally formed back in 1987. Yes, 1987. That's over 20 years worth of pop punk gold. So are you a fan of the early material? Or did you discover the band when *American Idiot* reinvigorated their career? Either way, *Green Day: Rock Band* has you covered.

THE SET LIST

Green Day: Rock Band features a collection of hits spanning the majority of the band's career as well as three of their biggest albums—*Dookie, American Idiot,* and *21st Century Breakdown*—for a grand total of 47 tracks. Each album stands alone as a unique "tour" through an unlockable track list (with stops along the way to play a few era-appropriate hits from Green Day's other albums).

THE VENUES

Unlike *The Beatles: Rock Band, Green Day* focuses more on capturing the essence of the band's live performances than providing an artistic retelling of its history. So instead of psychedelic backgrounds, there are stage divers, crowd surfers, fireworks, and authentic stage setups from a trio of significant shows: Milton Keynes, the massive British venue seen in the *Bullet in a Bible* live DVD; Fox Theater in Oakland, Calif., where the band premiered *21st Century Breakdown;* and "The Warehouse," an amalgam of the houses and smaller venues the band played while touring the country in their infamous Bookmobile.

THE EXTRAS

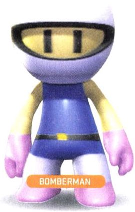
With over 110 photos and 40 minutes of rare and never-before-seen footage, *Green Day: Rock Band* rivals even the Beatles' game in terms of unlockable content. Unlike *The Beatles,* though, additional content is unlocked by completing challenges that can be purchased with "cred" earned by playing through each album, adding both variety and choice to the process. *Green Day* also features the ability to export all its tracks to *Rock Band 2,* assuming the game is either pre-ordered or the $70 special edition (which also comes with a download code for six *21st Century Breakdown* tracks already available as DLC).

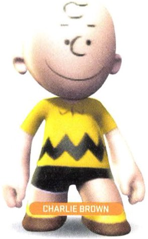
What say you: Is Green Day worthy of its own Rock Band *title? What group or artist would you like to see receive Harmonix's rock icon treatment next? Let us know at* PTOM_Letters@futureus.com.

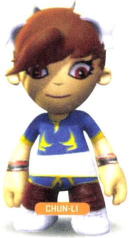
6 ModNation Racers

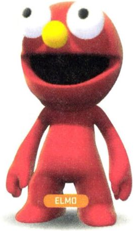
Ones we made earlier

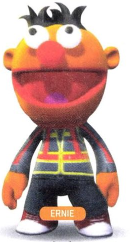
Take a look at these custom-built racers. They've *all* been created in the limited-access *ModNation Racers* Beta, which has just *10 percent* of the final game's options. The best bit? It's not just about cutting and pasting 2D stickers onto generic models—these guys are all 3D, allowing us to craft most every part of their body.

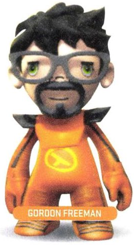


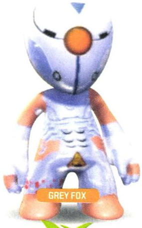

CHARLIE BROWN

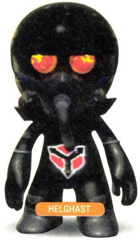


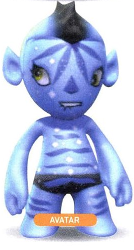


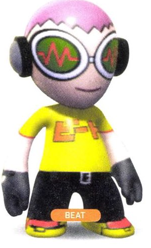


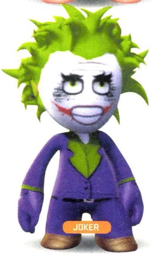

GORDON FREEMAN

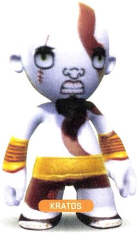












LEMMING

MARIO

MEGA MAN

NATHAN DRAKE

OLD SNAKE

PAC-MAN

PATAPON

PIP BOY

SACKBOY

SAM FISHER

SLY COOPER

SONIC

YODA

ZANGIEF

IRON MAN

JAK

7 Desert Resplendent

What do motorcycles, desert highways, and game design have in common? *Fallout: New Vegas*

Josh Sawyer: Mojave Wasteland badass.

PIONEER SALOO
BUFFALO BILL'S
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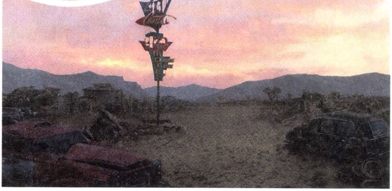
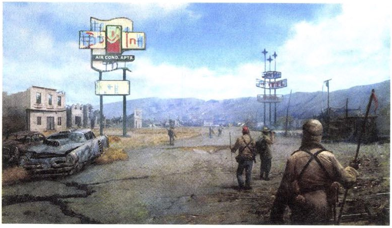
Traffic's much more reasonable in New Vegas.




AIR COND. APTS.

Project director Josh Sawyer is a model of commitment. And a total badass. As part of the early design process for *Fallout: New Vegas,* he decided to get a little firsthand experience with some of the harshest terrain the West has to offer.

"I took a motorcycle trip through Nevada and just camped out in the desert, took some reference photos, went to Good Springs—there actually is a saloon there that's very, very similar to the one in our game," Sawyer said during a recent chat about the next *Fallout's* setting. "A lot of people are like, 'What's in the desert? The desert is empty.' And I'm like, 'Not really, the desert is awesome!' [Laughs] There's lots of cool stuff in the desert. Being able to go out there and really just be isolated—you get to see the flora and fauna and just how things *are.*"

Sawyer's dedication should pay off in the form of a rich and compelling new wasteland for gamers to explore, but creating *New Vegas* won't be as easy as hopping on a motorcycle. "It's a difficult balancing act because it's a post-apocalyptic world but it can't just be another green-gray-brown world or it's just going to become visually boring."

Why the Mojave as a starting point, then? "If it were essentially the same Capital Wasteland-world of bleak skies, then I wouldn't really care as much," Sawyer says. "The Mojave Desert is starkly different from the D.C. area, and we knew we could establish a distinctly different look for the new game. That's evident by the blue skies and the warm color palette we use. But it's also very desolate. It's a desert, so it already resembles an apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic world."

But what really made the Mojave Desert the perfect choice was the city of Las Vegas itself. "We knew that we could hearken back to classic Vegas, like from the late '50s, early '60s, use a lot of Googie-style architecture and art inspiration for the buildings and the casinos, and that's very much in fitting with *Fallout's* overall retro-future, '50s-inspired aesthetic."

8

The Makeover

Lara goes fine to fab in five steps

1. Lose the Raider Raiding tombs is so 20th century. Today's gamer may want to explore tombs, but he certainly doesn't want to, like, raid them. So let's start this makeover with a brand-new title for today's on-the-go game heroine: *Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light.*

2. Get a partner Everyone who writes annoying makeover articles agrees Lara needs to find that special guy who can keep up with her. Cue Totec, an ancient warrior and protector of the now-stolen Mirror of Smoke. They'll need to recover the mirror together, which means tons of platforming, shooting, puzzle solving, and artifact collection.

3. Explore with a friend Lara and Totec will need to work together to solve puzzles. Discover a hard-to-reach artifact? Maybe Totec can throw his spears to create a series of handholds for Lara to climb up. Expect about six hours of gameplay, with adventurers able to drop in and out to team up as Lara and Totec.

4. Get a new life perspective Everyone can stand to see things a little differently. This time around, developer Crystal Dynamics is showing Lara in a new way, with a top-down view that's similar to the early *Legend of Zelda* or *Grand Theft Auto* titles.

5. Go online, Lara The 21st century woman doesn't just do her shopping online. She can even kick a few gigabytes' worth of ass online. *Guardian of Light* will be available via PSN download for $15.

9

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36 essential publisher, developer, community manager, and PTOM staff Twitter feeds

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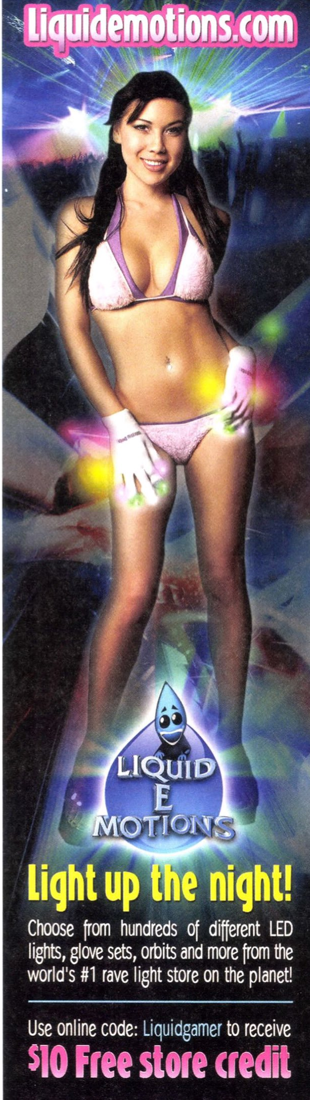

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10 Does the PS3 **really** need motion control?

Or: If we punch the air, does anyone actually get hurt?

YES

says the motionally secure Gary Steinman

It's the holy grail of gaming. Everyone wants it, but it seems forever out of reach. The Wii has come close—closer than anyone believed possible when it first set off on its own epic, arm-swinging quest. But no single system has yet to sip from the golden chalice that offers godlike powers to any console that fully embraces the casual and the hardcore gamer alike.

That's where the Move comes in. More than the Wiimote, this control system seems perfect for, uh, "real" gaming—yet simple enough for my gaming-challenged sister-in-law to have some fun when she requisitions my living room sofa during one of her delightfully extended visits.

I like that I can punch the air to smack a goon in the face. I like that when I swing my arm, I can hit a ping-pong ball. But most of all, I love that I can play a serious shooter like *SOCOM*—and it'll work. Good Move, Sony.

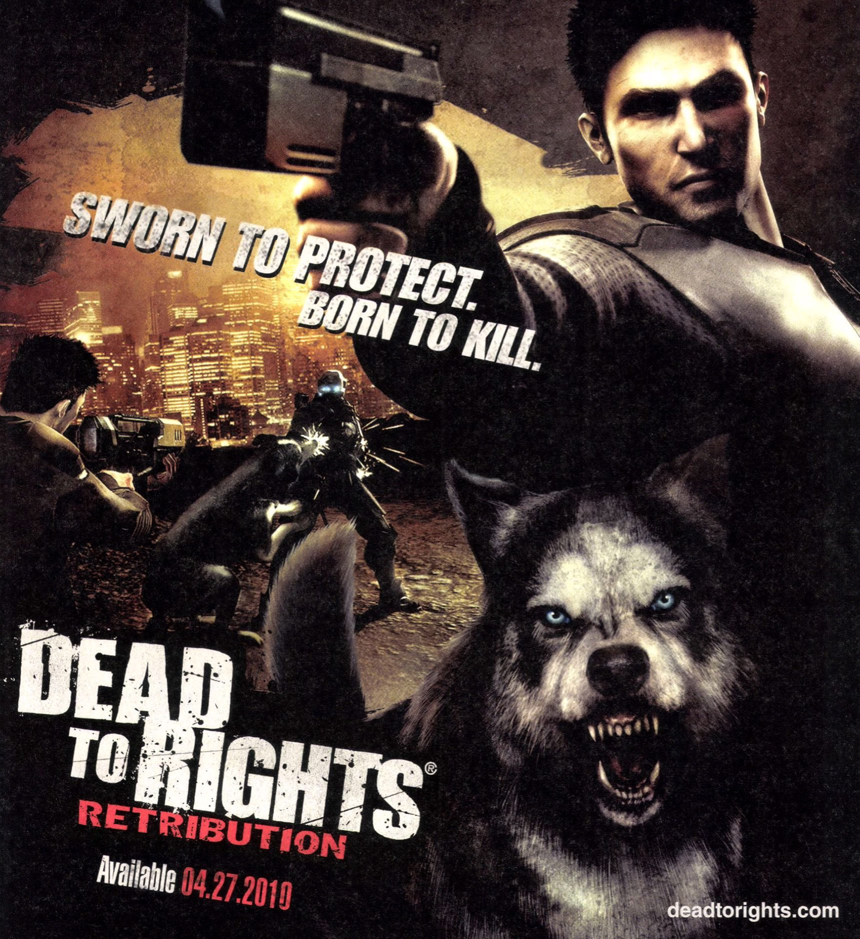
NO

says the utterly unmoved Scott Butterworth

Do motion controls make sense from a marketing perspective? Absolutely. If the PS3 can offer the same kind of casual gameplay that's made the Wii such a monumental success, Sony's bottom line just screams, "Go for it!" But here's the problem: Move might be too little, too late. Nintendo already owns the casual market that Move seeks to capture, and all the software unveiled so far doesn't seem all that different from what's already been available on the Wii for years. Without offering a significantly new experience, how can the Move possibly compete?

Sure, Sony's controller is more accurate, but the technology is still limited. So let's be honest here: Motion controls are essentially a gimmick (at least for now). They're fine for bite-sized casual games, but anything more advanced will inevitably feel clumsy and forced.

If you always wanted a Wii but never purchased one, Move might be for you. Otherwise, move on.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deadtorights.com

XBOX 360. XBOX LIVE.

PS3 PlayStation 3

PlayStation Network

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes
Use of Drugs

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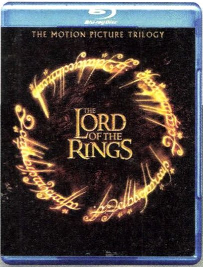
VOLATILE

namco®

Blu-ray Central

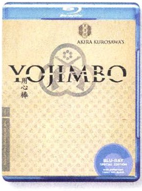


The Lord of the Rings: The Motion Picture Trilogy

PRICE: $99.98 **RATED:** PG-13

Fans have been pining for Peter Jackson's gorgeous translation of J.R.R. Tolkien's classics to hit Blu-ray since the format first appeared, and finally New Line has delivered. The first release of this cinematic treasure on Blu-ray is the entire trilogy as it appeared in theaters. While it's disappointing that these aren't the expanded cuts, it's hard to complain about the high-definition transfer. All three movies look and sound nothing short of stunning. The picture is crisp, clear, and amazingly sharp, with details visible now that you probably missed in the theater. The 7.1 audio track—which was already house shaking on DVD—is pristine and superbly defined. In short, this is one of the most stunning Blu-ray releases available.

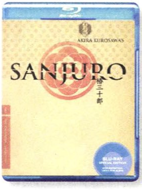
There are nine discs to this master collection. Three are the movies, three are digital copies, and three are bonus material discs that accompany each film. Sadly, the bonus features are DVDs, not Blu-ray, and a familiar collection of mostly promotional behind-the-scenes videos from a variety of TV networks. There are a couple music videos, and BD-Live support, but nothing new, hi-def, or particularly exciting. Although the extras are a letdown, the movies speak for themselves and this is simply the most spectacular way to watch one of the greatest of all cinematic epics.



Yojimbo

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** NOT RATED

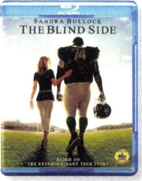
If you've ever wondered where most of the now-familiar elements of action movies came from, look no further than this 1961 Akira Kurosawa masterpiece. The story of a crude master swordsman who wanders into a town under siege by two gangs is classic, funny, and thoroughly entertaining. The director's usually serious nature takes a distant backseat for the film's black humor and great samurai action. Remade several times over the years, this is still the best telling of the story. If you haven't experienced this cinematic treasure, the pristine Criterion Collection edition with its scholarly commentary and excellent documentary is a must-view.



Sanjuro

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** NOT RATED

It's hard to imagine a sequel being more different than *Sanjuro*. Only a year separated from *Yojimbo*, the movie takes a very different look at Toshiro Mifune's wandering ronin. While Kurosawa's artistic genius is apparent here, *Sanjuro* focuses on Japanese court politics and dialogue over action and differs drastically from *Yojimbo's* theme and tone. Even the title character seems vastly different from the first film—much more serious and intelligent. Though not as accessible or as entertaining as *Yojimbo*, this is yet another superb Criterion Collection rendition, complete with insightful commentary and its own documentary.


SANDRA BULLOCK
THE BLIND SIDE
BASED ON THE EXTRAORDINARY TRUE STORY

The Blind Side

PRICE: $35.99 RATED: PG-13

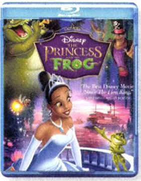
+ With all the Oscar attention and the schmaltzy based-on-a-true-story tag, it's easy for cynics to overlook *The Blind Side* as just another tearjerker chick-flick or lame sports movie. Actually, this is a movie that deserves all of its acclaim. Aside from easily being Sandra Bullock's best role in...well...ever, this is a poignant, intelligent, and well-acted story of a hulking inner-city kid who manages to find his way in the world thanks to an uppity white woman. The extras hit the right areas, focusing on the real-life characters the movie is based on—although commentary with them would have been even better.

Napoleon Dynamite
Gentlemen Broncos

Gentlemen Broncos

PRICE: $39.99 RATED: PG-13

+ Writer/director Jared Hess miraculously found fame with the bizarrely endearing *Napoleon Dynamite*. *Gentlemen Broncos* isn't as painfully awkward as *Dynamite*, or as comically goofy as Hess' *Nacho Libre*, but it's both brilliant and brilliantly funny. The story focuses on a teenage science-fiction writer squaring off against his idol, a has-been writer who steals his work (hilariously entitled Yeast Wars). The characters are eccentric and strange, and Sam Rockwell is particularly entertaining as the fictional hero Bronco/Brutus. There's a fair amount of extras as well, including amusing commentary.


Disney
THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG

The Princess and the Frog

PRICE: $39.99 RATED: G

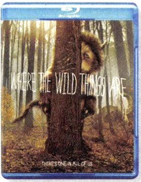
+ The first Disney animated film to feature an African American princess, *The Princess and the Frog* has more than cultural diversity on its menu. Randy Newman's New Orleans jazz- and zydeco-flavored soundtrack is spicier than the usual Disney musical fare, and a return to hand-drawn animation is a welcome respite from the modern-day parade of CG animated movies. The story is a minor weak point—it's pleasing, but not as memorable as Disney's classics. Extras are plentiful, but it's the "deleted scenes" compiled from storyboard art and test-dialogue tracks that are of most interest.

JUSTICE LEAGUE
CRISIS ON TWO EARTHS
SPECTRE

Justice League: Crisis on Two Earths

PRICE: $29.99 RATED: PG-13

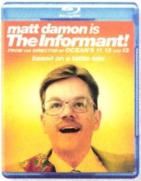
+ Warner Animation strikes again, and this story of alternate Earths is a topnotch rendition of the classic comic storylines. The PG-13 rating lets Warner get away with deranged villains (the evil Justice League includes a thug-like Superman, a psychotic Wonder Woman, and best of all, a nihilist Batman named Owlman) and the satisfying story boasts surprising philosophical depth. There are also four *Justice League* TV episodes, a short film based on the Spectre, and live-action premieres of the old Wonder Woman show and the CW's doomed Aquaman show.


WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE
THERE'S ONE IN ALL OF US

Where the Wild Things Are

PRICE: $35.99 RATED: PG

+ In *Being John Malkovich* and *Adaptation*, director Spike Jonze explored the darker aspects of adult nature in amazingly creative and clever ways. His adaptation of Maurice Sendak's classic children's story *Where the Wild Things Are* displays even more creativity and wonder. The wild things are amazingly expressive and human and the movie is a beautiful, brilliant, and moving look at adult and child dysfunction told through the eyes of young Max. Extras are relatively meager with a series of short production videos and a brief but hilarious puppet-version of another Sendak book, *Higglety Pigglety Pop!*


matt damon is
The Informant!
FROM THE DIRECTOR OF OCEAN'S 11, 12 AND 13
based on a tattle-tale

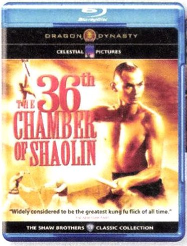
The Informant!

PRICE: $35.99 RATED: R

+ Steven Soderbergh's latest is almost like the anti-Erin Brockovich. Starring a nearly unrecognizable Matt Damon as Mark Whiteacre—a fantastically strange and inane whistle blower—the film moves in controlled fits and starts, holding viewers rapt thanks to Whiteacre's hilarious non-sequitur thoughts and an unbelievable series of events. The movie would be amazingly creative and nearly surreal regardless, but the fact that this is a true story elevates it to a higher level. Soderbergh's expert commentary is exclusive to the Blu-ray version, but there are no additional extras other than deleted scenes.

Black-and-Blu Beatdown

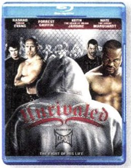
Forget plot and character development—all you really need are fists of fury and pain... Lots of pain.


DRAGON DYNASTY
CELESTIAL PICTURES
THE 36th CHAMBER OF SHAOLIN
"Widely considered to be the greatest kung fu flick of all time."
THE SHAW BROTHERS CLASSIC COLLECTION

The 36th Chamber of Shaolin

PRICE: $19.97 RATED: R

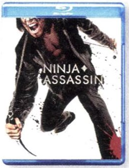
Considered an under-appreciated classic by kung fu aficionados, *36th Chamber* centers around anti-Manchu Chinese patriot San Te and the rigorous Shaolin training he endured. Old-school kung fu cool at its finest.


RASHAD EVANS
FORREST GRIFFIN
KEITH JARDINE
NATE MARQUARDT
Unrivaled
THE FIGHT OF HIS LIFE

Unrivaled

PRICE: $29.99 RATED: R

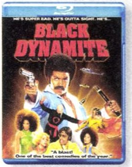
Tapout has started following the WWE into the movie biz, with surprising results. This is a gritty, well-filmed underdog fight movie that sticks to basics and is better than you'd expect.


NINJA ASSASSIN

Ninja Assassin

PRICE: $35.99 RATED: R

Bogged down by murky fight scenes and too much nonsensical exposition, *Ninja Assassin* falls flat, but fans of '80s-era ninja flicks will appreciate seeing Sho Kosugi again.

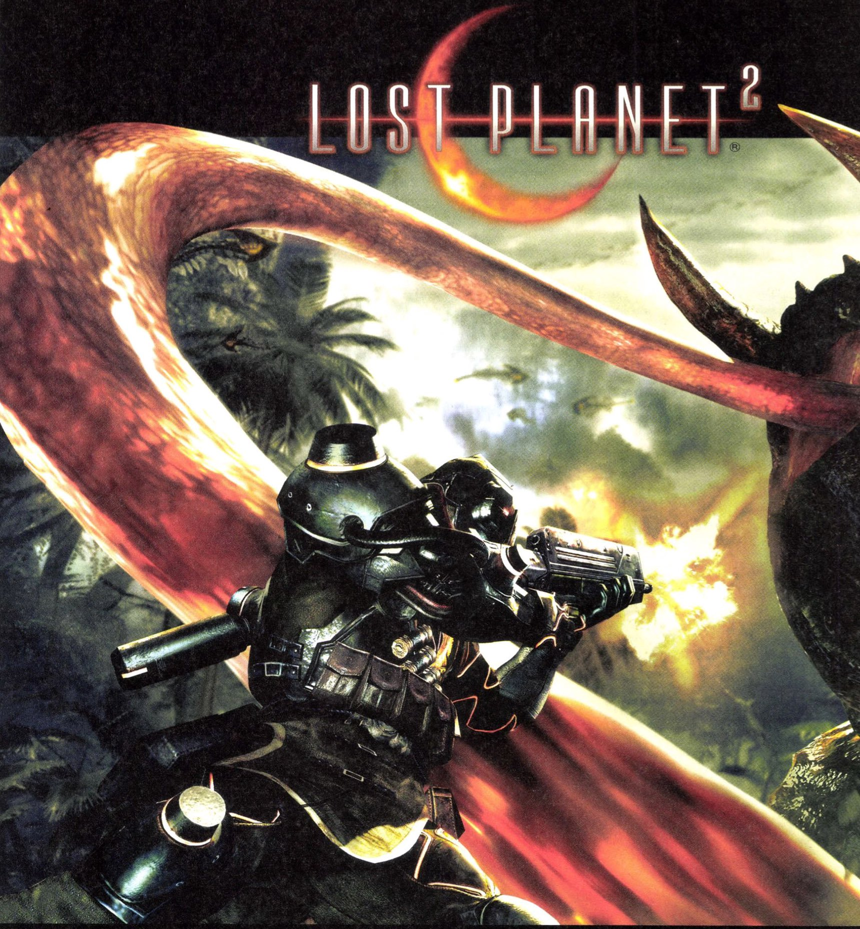

BLACK DYNAMITE
"A blast! One of the best comedies of the year."

Black Dynamite

PRICE: $34.95 RATED: R

A spoof on '70s blaxploitation films, *Black Dynamite* is the one hero "willing to fight The Man all the way from the blood-soaked city streets to the hallowed halls of the Honky House."

Questions, comments, rants, raves about our Blu-ray reviews? Email Jason D'Aprile at **PTOM_Bluray@futureus.com.**



TEEN ™

T

Animated Blood
Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PS3™

XBOX 360

XBOX LIVE

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KILL BIG
MAY 2010

www.lostplanet2game.com

Civil War rages across the six continents on EDN III, how will you respond? Team up with 4-player co-op and battle colossal Akrid, hordes of soldiers, and mechanical Vital Suits. Jump online and battle for territory in 16-player versus modes, and devise new strategies to fight as a squad.

Enormous Bosses • 4-Player Co-op
Customizable Arsenal • Immersive Environments

DEAD SPACE 2

In space, no one can hear you scream for more

PS3 AVAILABLE: Q4 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: Visceral Games

This place gives us the creeps. The pale light filtering through the towering stained-glass windows casts ethereal patterns on the harsh stone edges of the soaring gothic arches. The suicide-gray walls still echo the insane ravings of the cult-worshiping parishioners even after the initial utterances have long since died away. A cathedral, yes. But one whose ominous beauty feels unmistakably sinister.

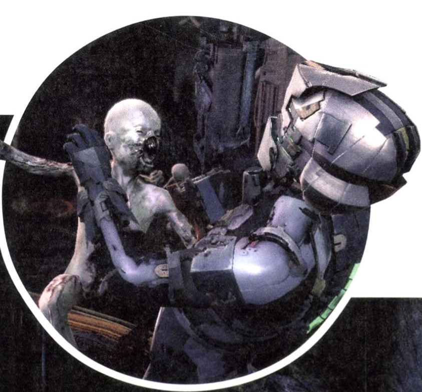
And in the midst of this palpable uneasiness stands Isaac Clarke—who, in his iconic and remarkably detailed space suit, looks strangely anachronistic. We can't help but feel that what we're seeing simply can't be real. Like we've somehow stepped directly into a nightmare. Of course, we soon discover that the real nightmare is just a few steps ahead.

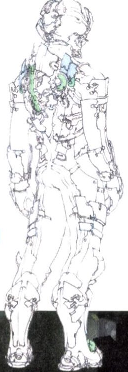
As Isaac creeps through the pews, a grotesque behemoth suddenly drops from the rafters, issuing a blood-curdling scream. It seizes Isaac with its wet, sinewy tendril and begins to drag him toward certain death—a situation all too familiar to those who played the original *Dead Space*. The entire scenario looks like a cutscene—raw, cinematic, and completely involving—yet Isaac retains the ability to aim and fire his weapon, like a sophisticated *God of War* quick-time event. Unfortunately, it's not enough to save him, and the monster brutally dismembers and decapitates the hapless Isaac with ultra-violent flare.

The second coming

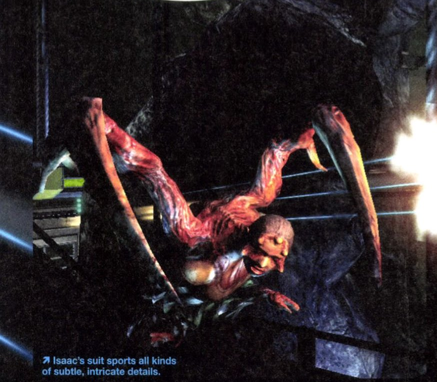
"So there's a reason I wanted to show you that first," executive producer Steve Papoutsis says. "A lot of people are wondering what's going on with *Dead Space*. 'Is it going to be all action-y?' I wanted to demonstrate to you right there that we are taking the horror component very seriously. There *is* action, but it's in the same vein of the original game. Isaac hasn't become a super soldier. He's still an engineer."

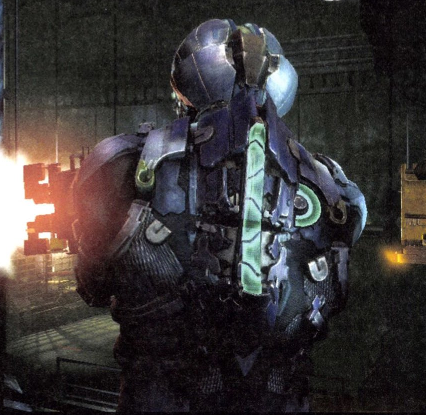
While Isaac may still be the badass engineer he's always been, his surroundings have certainly changed. Turns out that ominous cathedral—despite its stark, traditional appearance—resides on The Sprawl, a giant floating space metropolis built around a mining operation on one of Saturn's rings. It also belongs to the Church of Unitology, a cult that worships a mysterious alien monument called





> The Pack attacks as a group, rushing blindly at us. We panic, spraying the crowd with our rifle and meleeing anything nearby.



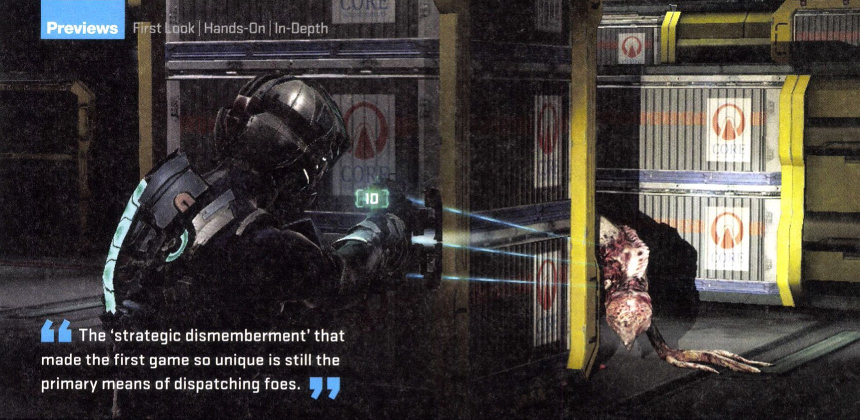


↗ Isaac's suit sports all kinds of subtle, intricate details.

The Marker and whose actions helped unleash a virus-like alien presence that turns human corpses into creatures called Necromorphs. Though three years have passed since the seemingly isolated outbreak in the first game, Isaac will once again have to fend off hordes of these monsters if he hopes to survive.

Having now recovered from our short, brutish experience in the church, Papoutsis continues our brief tour of The Sprawl and all of the delightful new horrors that lurk within. First up: a claustrophobic room full of Necromorphs. We recognize

↘ Think this looks creepy? It *sounds* even creepier.



> The 'strategic dismemberment' that made the first game so unique is still the primary means of dispatching foes.

several familiar faces—from the double scythe-arm sprinters to the arm-dragging suicide bombers—but the weapon in Isaac's hands is entirely new: the Javelin Gun. As the name suggests, it fires spears that impale enemies and pin their bodies to walls, producing a satisfyingly cringe-worthy sound effect.

Next, we wander into an eerily open space where we encounter a brand-new enemy: The Pack, whose disproportionately large head and gangly arms make it look like an overgrown infant. Unlike the typically lumbering and solitary Necromorphs of the first game, The Pack attacks as a group, rushing blindly at us. Overwhelmed, we panic, spraying the crowd with our assault rifle (which seems sleeker and more powerful now) and meleeing anything that gets too close.

After mopping up the hellish mob, we proceed to a docking warehouse and discover another new enemy: The Stalker, an almost dog-like monster that falls somewhere between *Resident Evil's* zombie pooches and *Jurassic Park's* velociraptors. Just like The Pack, Stalkers hunt in groups, but instead of immediately rushing us, they...well, *stalk* us, shifting the tone of the game from inescapable panic to unbearable tension. Fortunately, we're packing another new weapon called the Detonator, which—like *BioShock 2's* trap rivets—lays down a laser beam-triggered trip mine. This prevents Stalkers from silently creeping up behind us...for a while.

Finally, we reach a brightly lit hallway with a breathtaking view of the city's skyline. Here Papoutsis eagerly reveals *Dead Space 2's* capacity for environmental destruction: We easily smash through a glass door (which looks nearly identical to the annoyingly unbreakable cutscene barriers of the first game) and proceed to shoot down various light fixtures, which swing violently and cast dynamic shadows around the room. We then use our trusty Kinesis module to telekinetically pick up and fire the resulting debris into the nearest wall. And as a grand finale, we blow out a special space-facing window—decompressing the entire room and sucking several Necromorphs into space—before shooting a nearby switch to once again seal the room.

Return to form

Don't be concerned that all these new mechanics indicate a shift in the focus of *Dead Space 2's* action. According to Papoutsis, the "strategic dismemberment" that made the first game so gory and unique is still the primary means of dispatching our foes. "Isaac's just a bit more prepared to deal with these types of things after the first game. So it just feels better through the controller, but the same core *Dead Space* gameplay is there," Papoutsis says. "We're not turning it into, like, Space Commando." Translation: We can still tear Necromorphs limb from limb with our laser-based mining tools and stomp on what remains.

However, the development team hopes that introducing these new enemy types, gameplay mechanics, and weapons will add variety and force players to develop new strategies, which should make the game less predictable and ultimately more rewarding. "Keep them on the edge of their seat, but then mix it up with moments where they just feel like a badass," Papoutsis adds.

And seriously, what could be more badass than shooting a spear through a reanimated corpse's head before shooting out a window and sending it screaming into a cold, deep space grave? Well, maybe the zero-gravity gunfights we've been hearing rumors about... | **Scott Butterworth**

↙ The man behind the mask

Historically, mute helmet-wearing game heroes remain silent and masked for their entire career. Not so with Isaac Clarke. In *Dead Space 2*, Isaac will remove his helmet and speak with characters he encounters on The Sprawl. We heard several different voices coming through Isaac's radio during our demo and ran into the same female NPC several times. Isaac's clearly got a handful of new allies this time around, but it's unclear what sort of roles they will play.

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Hero of Leaf Valley

Sow a Heroic Farming Tale!

The tranquil town of Leaf Valley
is scheduled for demolition!
You'll need to grow crops, raise animals,
and mine ores and gems to help save
Leaf Valley and your family farm.

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GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER

We have seen the future, and it involves men pointing guns at one another

PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Shooter PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Paris

Forget *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter.* "Advanced" just doesn't cut it any more. The once-futuristic gear from the *Warfighter* games is in real-world use today. It's time for a future soldier to emerge.

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier offers play as one of four top-tier spec op soldiers ("Ghosts") sent in when things go FUBAR. This time the Ghosts have shiny new toys to play with, including exoskeletons, soldier-targeting homing missiles, state-of-the-art sensor equipment, robot battle drones, and optical camouflage straight out of the *Predator* movie.

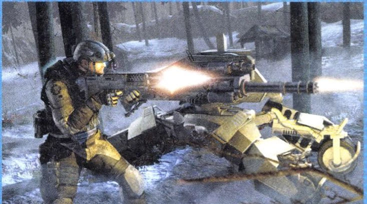
Choose your weapon

The new tech is split among four soldier classes: commando, engineer, recon, and sniper, each of which gets a specific set of gizmos. The Commando are all about direct attack, so they get a modular assault rifle with a mix-and-match underslung shotgun or grenade launcher and a shoulder-mounted rocket launcher firing tiny homing projectiles.

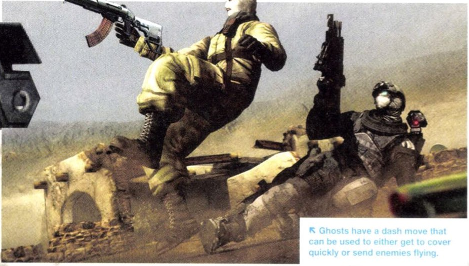
Engineers can suit up with an exoskeleton, a robotic set of leg braces allowing them to carry extra gear. They're responsible for the airborne UAV drone too, which can be directly controlled, but now comes armed as well. In addition, engineers pack a set of high-frequency sound emitters that can fry electronics from a distance and are handy for disabling Ghost-shredding bombs.

The last two classes are lighter on their feet. Recon soldiers get a suite of scanning gear, such as heartbeat sensors and sound detectors to pinpoint enemy targets. Snipers possess possibly the best bit of technology in an optical cloak, which reduces its wearer to a near-invisible blur.

↘ Send in the drones



The last *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter* game saw soldiers using the Mule—a suitcase on wheels—to deliver weapons and gear in the field. *Future Soldier* offers the Ground Drone, which swaps storage space for more guns. It can handle almost any terrain, and it makes great mobile cover. It's not indestructible on the battlefield, but it can be easily replaced—unlike soldiers.



↖ Ghosts have a dash move that can be used to either get to cover quickly or send enemies flying.

Tactics!

Future Soldier presents one more surprise: players won't get to issue orders. The idea is these soldiers are so highly trained and used to working together that they don't need to be told what to do. In single player, it means trusting the AI-controlled squadmates to do the right thing. In drop-in/out cooperative play, stupid players can forgo combat and just jump directly into the grave.

Replacing squad commands is the ability to link up, which has two possible effects. Getting close to a squad member means a player can access his gear. Managing skills and the other soldiers' equipment becomes all-important.

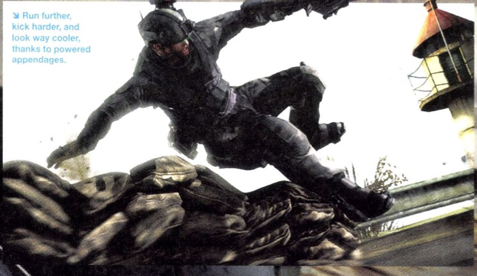
It's also possible to join squad members in a similar fashion to *Army of Two.* Get close to someone, hit the Circle button and a link is formed. The leader then controls the movement, with the player-controlled character walking behind an ally automatically. The connection is elastic, enabling the linked soldier to still maneuver in a limited area. In this way, players can leave the steering to someone else while they focus on covering angles of attack. The entire four-man squad can link up this way, snaking through levels like a well-armed train.

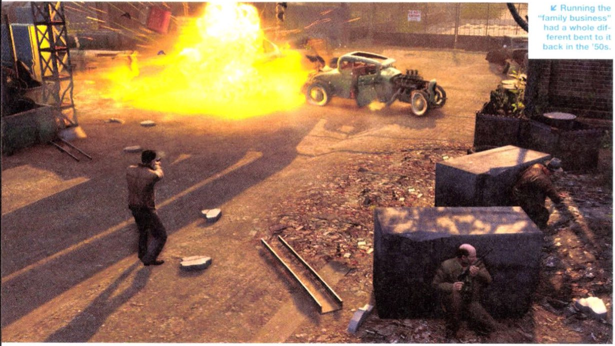
Combat is more mobile this time, too, with lunges or dives to get safely behind walls or cars. Soldiers can even slide into enemies to knock them flying. There's a greater emphasis on hand-to-hand combat and getting in closer for kills.

We also got a brief glimpse of the multiplayer, which pits eight-man teams against each other. Here, even the Ground Drone—a machine gun on wheels—will be a selectable class. Again, the emphasis will be on teamwork, with groups linking up to share and enhance their individual abilities.

The top-notch military tech certainly looks sexy and *Ghost Recon's* already proved it could do pounding urban combat with the *Advanced Warfighter* series. Adding co-op and shifting the action to Europe seems certain to enhance the experience. | Leon Hurley

↘ Run further, kick harder, and look way cooler, thanks to powered appendages.





↙ Running the "family business" had a whole different bent to it back in the '50s.

↑ Bunnies ahoy!

2K Games struck a deal with Playboy Enterprises to include classic *Playboy* covers and centerfold images in *Mafia II*. Players can hunt for tiny and no-doubt pixilated boobery in 1950s Empire Bay; Playboy didn't begin publishing until 1953.

MAFIA II

All in the Family redux

PS3 AVAILABLE: August GENRE: Adventure PUBLISHER: 2K Games DEVELOPER: 2K Czech

Consider it a U.S. history lesson: *Mafia II* promotes bad citizenship through crime and wanton acts of ventilating goombahs with heaters. A *Grand Theft Auto*-styled adventure, *MII* offers up a fictional East Coast city in the very New York mold (Empire Bay), and lots of opportunities to explore a gangster's oftentimes-violent lifestyle with shoot-'em-ups, burglaries, carjackings, and felonious assaults and batteries.

The game stars young lantern-jawed Vito Scaletta, who returns to Empire Bay fresh from the fighting in World War II. Initially, there's some concern about Vito heading back to the front, but his buddy Joe Barbaro makes some calls. "Like I said, I know people," Barbaro says. With that, Vito is free to venture into crime, his pal Joe at his side.

The goal, of course, is to become a made man, but this is a long and winding road. As he progresses, Vito will be able to hijack roughly 50 different cars (each with its own peculiarities in terms of speed and maneuvering) and utilize weapons such as baseball bats and guns of the grease, machine, and hand varieties.

Smokes, smoking, smoked

The game sprawls out over the mid-1940s to the 1950s, and presents two versions of Empire Bay. The first reflects a grittier, downtrodden Bay right at the end of World War II and, later, the city is shown in its more prosperous post-war phase. Each of these versions for Empire Bay features its own musical soundtrack and period-specific references: cruise around in the '50s, for example, and car radios blare out "Not Fade Away" by Buddy Holly or Ritchie Valens and his "Come on, Let's Go."

In "Wild Ones," a mission set in the 1950s, Vito finds himself in a scene that tips its hat directly to Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas.* With Joe Barbaro acting as a vendor, Vito had to locate and toss color-coded (stolen) cigarettes to his partner before a rude interruption—in this case, a rival gang.

Violence, as sure as fat Elvis liked cake, ensued. With the cigarettes torched and an enemy gangster executed at almost point-blank range, *Mafia II* earned its Mature-rating in less than two minutes of play.

This set up a revenge scenario wherein Vito must find and locate the Milleville Diner, a run-down eatery now serving as a bar, and shoot it to hell and back. Unopposed, Vito's gang was free to fire off round after round into the abandoned diner, shattering its windows, riddling its wooden frame and, most delightfully, plinking the letters off its welcoming sign. To complete the destruction, Vito and his antisocial pals used Molotov cocktails to burn the place down.

After the destruction of the bar/diner, a shootout was in order. This may have seemed like standard third-person perspective gunplay as done by countless titles, but *Mafia II* made a good show, throwing plenty of enemies at Vito and creating tense moments with foes jumping into cars and attempting to run over their attackers. The fighting took place in an industrial yard laden with huge concrete blocks, rusted barrels, and unused cars serving as points of cover against the lead hail; these cover points proved invaluable, as the game doesn't suffer fools or foolhardy rushes into gunfire.

Horse head blues

2K Games promises the life of a Mafioso won't be glamorous, and the cops will be ever-present in Empire Bay. The developers referred to their police awareness system as a "cool, unique feature," but refused to elaborate on how it works within the game, or what it means for players.

As for the rest, well, a gangster might have a rough life, but he can at least dress for success. As Vito rides around Empire Bay, he'll have access to all manner of shops, including clothing stores where he can dude himself up like the Capone or Lucky Luciano he aspires to be. If nothing else, he can make a finely dressed corpse. | Greg Orlando

ENSLAVED

Monkey see, Monkey smash

PS3 AVAILABLE: Q4 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai DEVELOPER: Ninja Theory

Tough luck, Monkey. Bad enough that his world is in ruins. Ugly enough that he's imprisoned on a slave ship. Awful enough that the ship blows up, and he barely makes it to an escape pod, only to be locked out of said pod by the very person who made the ship go kablooey. Terrible enough that he gets knocked out as he grabs hold of the escape pod's exterior. But the capper on his crap day? When he awakes, Monkey is wearing a headband that puts him under full control of Trip, a delicate young lady who was more than willing to leave our hero behind on the ship *she* exploded, but who now needs his help.

Thus begins a troubled partnership that starts with painful head-zappings and threats of death by cranial detonation, but—we're somehow sure—will end up with a new understanding and mutual trust…and perhaps even love?

Either way, Monkey now has a task, and that's to get Trip back home, which, he's told, is some 300 miles west of where they crash-landed in this post-apocalyptic New York City.

Down with brown

But first, some sightseeing—because this isn't a typical post-apocalypse. We're 150 years in the future, so Monkey will encounter all kinds of hostile tech, like mechs with biomechanical trappings (including humanoid spines) that roam the ghostly city in search of people to beat up. But gone is that too-familiar brownish wasteland, replaced with lush greens punctuated by pops of vibrant red and stark white flowers. Mankind, with his incessant warfare, might have destroyed this city, but nature has reclaimed the world.

Don't be fooled by the foliage, though. This is still dangerous terrain, and Trip needs Monkey's brawn to survive. Yes, she's a tech whiz, which means she's great at helping the duo by scanning the environment with a reprogrammed droid (her "dragonfly"), or setting up holographic decoys to draw enemy fire, or using other unrevealed skills that she'll

develop throughout the game. But she still needs Monkey's acrobatic skills to clamber through the wreckage (while she rides on his back), and his combat prowess to bash and blast the baddies with his very big stick. During a demo of the early levels, Tameem Antoniades, co-founder and chief designer at developer Ninja Theory, told us that most of the game's challenges include multiple paths, allowing players to employ their own tactics to survive. He then showcased this by first taking an indirect path across the dilapidated rooftop, dropping down behind a mech, bashing it to bits, then ripping a massive gun from its hands to mow down other onrushing mechs. Later, we saw a similar sequence via the "direct route," in which Monkey strolled straight into the battlefield and squared off against several mechs. "You really shouldn't fight more than three or four at once," Antoniades warned, and it was easy to see why. Despite his ferocious physique and feral moves, Monkey was almost overwhelmed—until Trip used her decoy skill to draw away some fire, providing Monkey barely enough breathing room to survive.

> **" Trip needs Monkey's acrobatic skills to clamber through the wreckage and his combat prowess to bash baddies with his very big stick. "**

Journey to the west

Enslaved promises a mix of combat, puzzle-solving, clambering, and storytelling, all integrated, all in roughly equal amounts. What we saw shows much promise—especially the refreshing visual approach to post-apocalypse—but it's still quite early, and Ninja Theory has plenty of work in front of it. Combat is the biggest unknown. Antoniades promises that it won't require any memorizing, that it will be skillful yet accessible, and that countering and blocking are essential (though Monkey won't be able to block forever without consequences). That all sounds fine, but we were a bit underwhelmed by the generic and choppy fighting in our early peek. Of course, that could all change when we get our hands on Monkey again in a subsequent build.

Until then, we're looking forward to *Enslaved's* unique take on our future. It's pretty, it's dangerous, it's unlike any other post-apocalyptic world we've witnessed in recent years. And we've yet to see what happens when the duo leaves New York (which comprises the other 80 percent of the game). Heck, maybe Monkey's luck will turn around as soon he steps outside the city—but either way, he's got a long, strange trip ahead of him. | **Gary Steinman**

↘ Monkey Math *Enslaved's formula for success revealed*

PRETTY
Developer Ninja Theory already knows all about gorgeous. Want proof? Check out the lush, lovely *Heavenly Sword*.

+

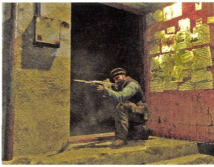
AGILE
Clambering around the ruined New York reminds us of the rhythmic tap-tap-tap joy we got from playing *Prince of Persia* 2008.

+

DARK
Based on the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*, but written by *28 Days Later's* screenwriter Alex Garland—not known for happy endings.

+

CODEPENDENT
Like *Ico's* Yorda, Monkey needs to carry Trip along and keep her alive. Unlike Yorda, Trip will kill Monkey if he tries to leave.



↑ Shoot the Colonel's dog, and you'll have to guard the help-wanted board.

MEDAL OF HONOR

Sledgehammer meets the Scalpel

PS3 AVAILABLE: September GENRE: Shooter PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: EALA/DICE

"The war rages on," *Medal of Honor* tells us. "We have dealt the enemy many crushing blows." But, and there is always a "but" to be had...

"They are not as weak as we once thought."

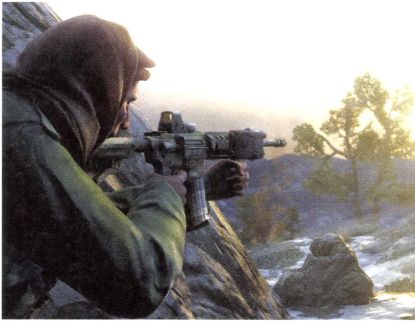
Medal of Honor traditionally concerned itself with World War II, but those days are over and done with. Electronic Arts refers to this new *Honor* as a reset of the franchise, and has chosen a modern setting for its action: Afghanistan. This is a new war, with a new enemy, and modern warfare, simply, requires new tactics. That means we'll now experience first-person combat with both the "scalpel"—tactical operations performed by highly trained operatives—and the more straightforward army operations referred to as "the sledgehammer."

"The place is crawling with boogers," a soldier notes. Boogers, for the uninitiated, are bad, bad men. Today, we're seeing warfare in the scalpel tradition: with stealth, precision, and extreme aggression. A squad leader barks out commands, and these aren't suggestions: *Stay low. Let 'em pass.* And, finally, *Take 'em out.* The goal here is to clear space, to get rid of a series of anti-aircraft guns that will torment any planes that attempt to land or drop supplies.

Scalpel teams—known as Tier 1 operators—dress in local garb. "They work in places where they have to fit in," the game's senior creative director Rich Farrelly says. They also work silently, choking out or stabbing enemies, until it's time to go hot, by which it is meant shoot bullets aplenty. And they have to make tough decisions, shoving their chair-strapped, booby-trapped allies out the door before they explode.

Electronic Arts' foray into surgical warfare takes a decidedly more explosive turn after the guns have been dispatched. When it comes time to take out a truck convoy curling its way up a snowy mountain route, the operators must mark their targets with a laser, enabling fighter planes to blow it up with a prejudice most extreme.

All the elements for the reset are in place, and the game's single-player adventure will be complemented by a collection of multiplayer modes featuring new game maps by *Battlefield* developer DICE. "We found the fun," Farrelly says, "and are now turning the crank to make things look pretty." | Greg Orlando



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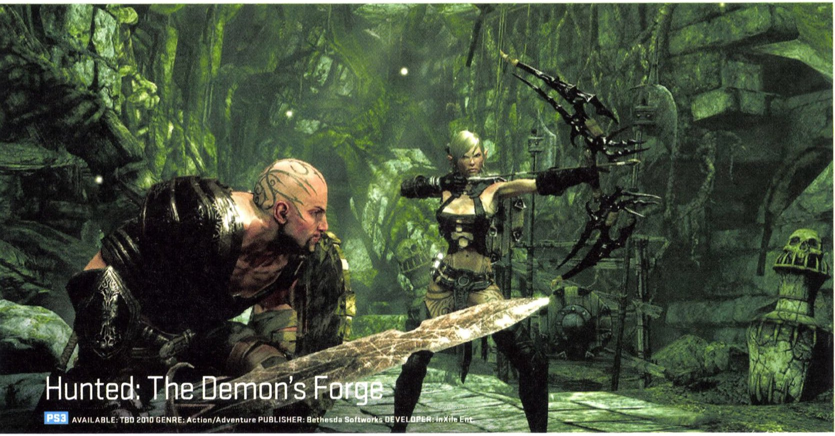
PlayStation Gallery



Hunted: The Demon's Forge

PS3 AVAILABLE: TBD 2010 GENRE: Action/Adventure PUBLISHER: Bethesda Softworks DEVELOPER: inXile Ent.

Billed as a modern take on the classic dungeon crawl, *Hunted: The Demon's Forge* hopes to marry linear exploration—complete with secret rooms, environmental puzzles, and crazy, crazy loot—with cover-based third-person action. Players will partner up (either online or with an AI buddy) and venture into the titular forge as either the hilariously masculine Caddoc or the predictably saucy E'lara. Both characters offer a similar mix of ranged, melee, and magic attacks, though each has particular strengths and specialties. Considering the Tolkien-esque fantasy setting and the focus on collecting mystical crystals, we predict scattered evil with a 100-percent chance of giant spiders. | Scott Butterworth

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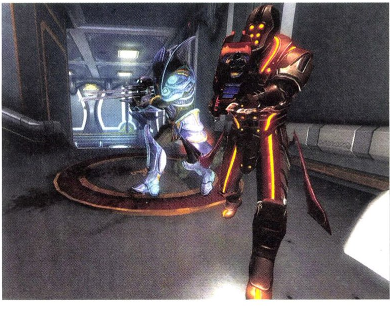
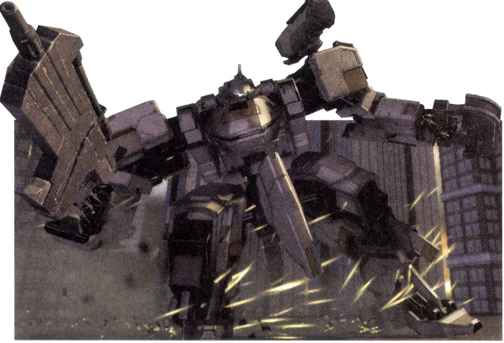
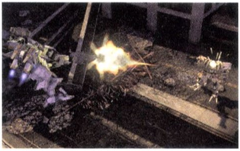
Nexuiz

PS3 AVAILABLE: TBD 2010 GENRE: First-person shooter PUBLISHER: Illfonic DEVELOPER: Illfonic

The slick first-person shooter *Nexuiz,* released open-sourced on the PC, is getting a console makeover. Neon-laden arena-based shooting here is lightning-fast and comes with nine different projectile and melee weapons, as well as a "dynamic mutator" system that rewards kill chains with instant upgrades or modifications. Role-playing elements also allow for permanent skill upgrades, which the devs say won't imbalance play. *Nexuiz* allows for 16-player Capture the Flag matches and eight-man Deathmatches with requisite leaderboards. | Greg Orlando







Front Mission Evolved

PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Third-person shooter PUBLISHER: Square Enix DEVELOPER: Double Helix Games

No longer a niche turn-based strategy franchise, *Front Mission* has *Evolved* to become... a third-person, fast-paced shooter? Players can still deck out their mech in their favorite fighting style, but now they'll be deploying into urban environments for some real-time action. Also new to the franchise is the ability to hop out of the Wanzer (that's what they call giant robots...in the future...in Germany) and continue the fight on foot. | David Murphy

Blacklight: Tango Down

PSN AVAILABLE: Summer GENRE: First-person shooter PUBLISHER: Ignition Ent. DEVELOPER: Zombie Int.

This online-only shooter promises to deliver focused eight-vs.-eight battles in futuristic urban environments. As players progress in combat, they gain access to handy high-tech equipment, such as vision-impairing electro-magnetic grenades and the ability to temporarily see enemy data signatures through walls. Think of it as *Blade Runner* meets *Counter-Strike*. | DM

Kingdom Hearts: Birth By Sleep

PSP AVAILABLE: Summer GENRE: Action RPG PUBLISHER: Square Enix DEVELOPER: Square Enix

RITICAL
IMPACT
Blade
k Haze
ulum
Surge
FOCUS
MAX

While we continue pining for a true sequel, *Birth By Sleep* delivers another sidestory (in this case, a prequel) in the ever-expanding *Kingdom Hearts* universe. Play as Ven (who looks suspiciously similar to another hero we've seen before) and discover the origins of the Unversed, a new enemy wreaking havoc across the Disneylands. | DM

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(Re)birth of a Prince

A swinging new game. A spectacular big-budget motion picture. PTOM has an exclusive look at the royal return of the Prince of Persia.

It's been a long, winding road for this prince.

In 1989, more than 20 years ago, *Prince of Persia* was born from the fertile mind of creator Jordan Mechner. It became one of the most important titles of its generation, taking the medium in general—and the action-adventure genre, more specifically—to new heights. A combination of gorgeous, stylized 2D animation, deft storytelling, and smart gameplay mechanics, *Persia* is recalled with fond memories by just about anyone who played computer games during the 1990s.

The series was reborn in 2003, when Ubisoft released *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time,* a full 3D reinterpretation of the source material. Mechner worked on the Ubisoft title, helping to preserve and evolve the tone of the game, and easing its transition into a world of realistic characters, elaborate cutscenes, and, of course, three dimensions. While the remake was something of a slow burn at retail, it eventually established enough of a following to spur the development of two full-fledged sequels, a grip of handheld and off-platform spinoffs, an entirely new reimagining of the prince for the PS3, a graphic novel, and next month, a fourth sequel *(The Forgotten Sands)* alongside the release of a major motion picture from Jerry Bruckheimer films.

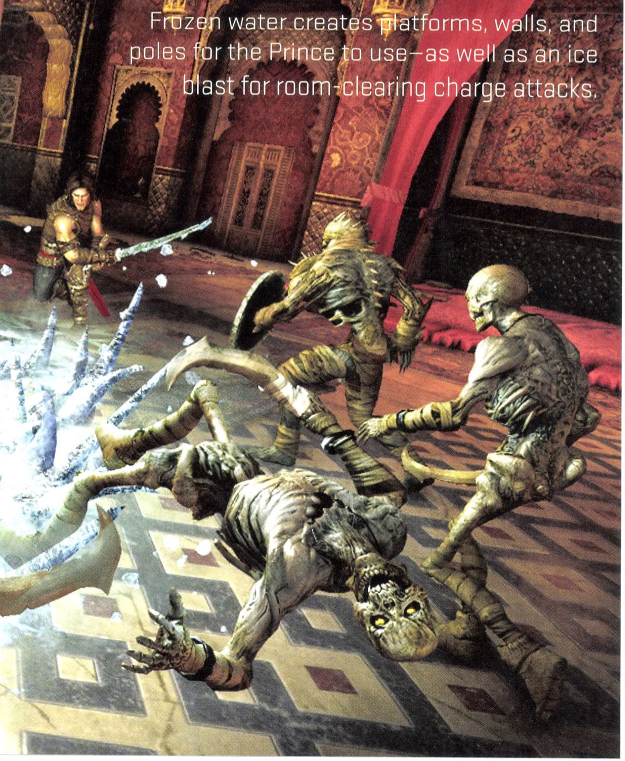
From small screen to big it has gone, then, with many mid-sized screens in between.

Jean-Christophe Guyot, creative director at Ubisoft Montreal, is telling us about the publisher's choice of source material. "It was a natural step for us. We felt that different stories could be told with the same character and within the same universe. The *Prince of Persia* universe is more of a storytelling type, and as such, we wanted to bring back the original Prince in the *Sands of Time* storyline and continue the tale." But this isn't the fourth chapter in the series. The new game takes place during the seven-year gap between the original *Sands of Time* and its sequel *Warrior Within*—and while stylistically similar, does not parallel the events of the film.

Indeed, jumping into the game, we're distinctly reminded of *Sands of Time*, with its almost painterly visual style and dizzying assortment of acrobatics. One of the major new gameplay mechanics in *Forgotten Sands* comes in liquid form: namely, water. Waterfalls, fountains, and various other sources of H_2O dot the landscape, and the prince has the power to manipulate it. Hold down L2, and all the water in a given area will freeze for as long as it is depressed. Frozen water creates platforms, walls, and poles for the Prince to use to his tactical advantage, and many of the game's puzzles bring this to the forefront.

EARTH, WIND, AND FIRE TOO

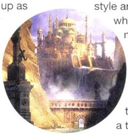
The water effect is gorgeous, and as development progressed on the game, it became a central thematic element. "We started with water as our main power," says Guyot. "We wanted to take the *Sands of Time* acrobatics and expand them. The water power is interesting because you have to hold down the button to activate the power, and then continue with your acrobatic move. It gets interesting when you introduce the idea of having to release the button to unfreeze everything." Combined with the dash power (which is activated during a jump, allowing us to leap over large gaps), it creates some utterly devious tests of skill. In one level, the puzzles required intricate timing on our part, as we had to alternate between freezing and unfreezing water while launching the Prince



Frozen water creates platforms, walls, and poles for the Prince to use—as well as an ice blast for room-clearing charge attacks.

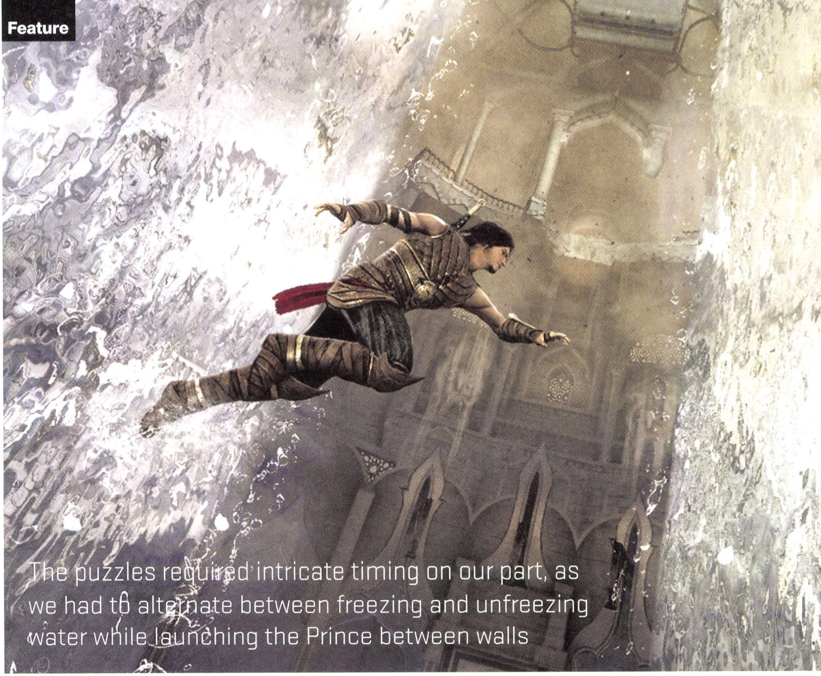
between walls. "What I like about the water power is that it's scalable," says Guyot. "On one hand it's very approachable, it's easy to use—you just freeze it and use it. On the other hand, there's a lot of ramp up as you progress and discover different ways to use it"

Other elements—earth, fire, and wind—become a part of the action as well, and much effort was put into balancing the game's upgrade and power trees. "Initially during testing, we found the game focused too much on combat and was too difficult, so players put most of their experience into increasing their life and upgrading the earth armor power," says Guyot. As they continued to tweak the game, however, they noticed that players began upgrading their powers based on their playing style and personality. Players who are into the parkour elements of the game (or simply like to run around like a child without his Ritalin) tend to focus on the fire power, as it encourages them to dash about with a trail of fire behind them, setting enemies ablaze. The ice blast, on the other hand, favors charge attacks, while those who tried to avoid combat altogether went with the wind-based tornado power. They even saw their testers using powers in wholly unexpected ways: when one of them fought a charging enemy, for example, he waited until the last second before impact, then activated the tornado power to send that enemy flying. In the end, the objective was to create a superbly balanced way for everyone to customize their play styles and focus on their favorite techniques—an important goal considering the decision to move away from the "no death" approach of the last game (see sidebar). Whatever their chosen play style, gamers will once again be able to rewind time, stealing back several seconds whenever they miss a jump or take too much damage.



The Rebirth of Death

The previous PS3 *Prince of Persia* took a rather bold approach to player death: It simply did not allow for it. In other words, no matter how badly we messed up, we couldn't die. Generally speaking, this was something that we quite enjoyed, but it gave the *Prince* an accessibility that some hardcore gamers found borderline offensive. "The 'no death' approach was a move we stand by," says Guyot. "Some people liked it, some people didn't, and we think there's still a place for innovations like this in the gaming universe. What we did for *Forgotten Sands* is provide a number of comfort powers: powers that are not really necessary to progress throughout the game, but that you will be happy to have when things get tough." Even the hardcore should appreciate the rewind-time ability, for those heart-wrenching and crucial missed jumps.



The puzzles required intricate timing on our part, as we had to alternate between freezing and unfreezing water while launching the Prince between walls

CLOAK AND DAGGER

Sword fighting has always been something of a sore point in the *Prince* series. Ever since the original *Sands of Time*—arguably, in fact, since the Mechner original—the block-heavy, somewhat predictable flow of combat has earned more than its share of detractors. In *Forgotten Sands,* the combat engine has been redesigned, and been both tightened up and expanded considerably during the process. This time around, players will be facing much larger groups of enemies—as many as 50 at a time, such as one point during our climb up a mountainside—and gone entirely is the ability to block. Instead, we must now master a series of evasive maneuvers, which can be synced with various attacks into deadly combinations and swift changes of tact. The result is combat that feels faster and more fluid, without losing any of its strategic complexity.

While it may sound like Videogames 101, the simple ability to kick opponents (or bash them with our shield) adds a new layer of strategic depth to the proceedings, like leading with our foot to stun an enemy, then putting together a series of dynamic maneuvers to seal the deal. When we were up against a fairly large group of ruffians, we were even able to surf the crowd on our own two feet, recalling the sort of acrobatic swashbuckling previously relegated to the world of cinema, with its invisible wires and multiple takes. Here, hopping across the top of a crowd, dancing upon the heads of our enemies, and finally dropping down for a dramatic attack as we barrel back into the fray, is truly something worth experiencing. And it's a sight to behold as well: The camera manages to capture and adjust to the flow of these battles, then pans across the crowd to convey an impressive sense of scale.

Finishing moves, like vaulting over an enemy and inserting the Prince's sword into its back, also return for this saga.

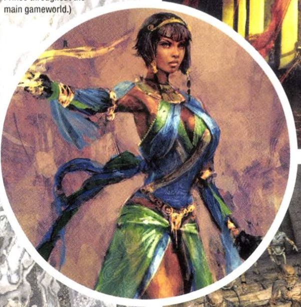
Bosses, likewise, figure heavily in the redesign. "We wanted to promote the powers the player gains throughout the story, and wanted to somehow integrate them into combat, namely the boss battles," says Guyot. "At the same time it was also important to incorporate the story, characters, and bosses into the mix so there would be a sense of progression." The team has focused its efforts on creating a general sense of learning; the enemies and bosses are built around a set of abilities, and players can fight them and master the new powers and acrobatics as they do so. "Every boss fight has some sort of acrobatic component involved," continues Guyot.

DYNASTY WARRIOR

Ubisoft Montreal is, of course, the studio behind the *Assassin's Creed* series, and the nearly six years of labor on those games paid dividends in *Forgotten Sands'* development. In fact, the team is using the Anvil engine that was created specifically for *Assassin's Creed,* which allowed them to create enormous environments while displaying huge numbers of onscreen enemies. "We know what works and doesn't work in the development process for large-scale

GENIE IN A FOUNTAIN ↘

Razia is a djinn (read: genie) the Prince accesses at The Magic Fountain, a mystical realm where the Prince acquires new magic powers. (Unlike, say, the last *PoP* game's Elika, who followed the Prince throughout the main gameworld.)



triple-A titles, giving us more time to focus on creating a great game," says Guyot.

In many ways, *Forgotten Sands* looks and feels like a next-generation evolution of the original series-reboot, *Sands of Time*. It's a game full of the rich art direction that initially brought so many fans to the series, along with a similar brand of puzzle and level design. It's no coincidence that the voice of the *Sands of Time's* Prince, actor Yuri Lowenthal, has returned to reprise his role for *Forgotten Sands*. It's all in an effort to recapture the magic, and provide fans with the same sense of wonder they felt at the previous game's conclusion.

"We had a lot of ideas we wanted to put into *Sands of Time* that just weren't possible back then," says Guyot. "We can revisit some of these ideas thanks to the technology and talent now available at Ubisoft."

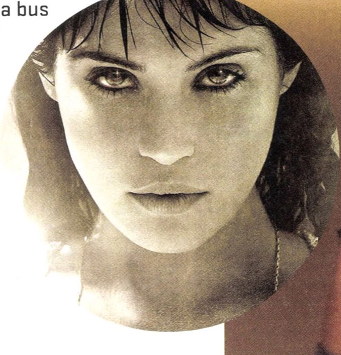
PSPrince

Bringing the highflying, camera-spinning aerial madness of *Forgotten Sands* to a platform like PSP sounds like a recipe for cramped hands (and broken PSPs). So Ubisoft did the obvious thing: took out half a dimension. In our brief hands-on, the 2.5D side-scrolling game recalled the Mechner original, with much-simplified controls and a polished, cartoony look that manages to sit nicely alongside its PS3 sibling. While details are hazy, we're told that the PS3 version will have an exclusive connectivity bonus with the PSP *Forgotten Sands*.

Prince of Persia

Hands-Free Edition

The marketing blitz for one of this summer's biggest blockbuster movies, *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time,* has officially hit. Images of a leather-clad, longhaired Jake Gyllenhaal adorn many a bus stop throughout the country as gamers await the most popcorn-friendly rendition of the series to date. We met with Jake to chat about his princely turn.



You've probably been offered roles in quite a few big action movies in your career. Why did you choose to do this one?

Jake Gyllenhaal: Because of the character. I've read a lot of scripts from huge movies and I think [I was drawn in] by the wry humor and the dryness of this character, particularly in how it was written. He did cool stuff, but at the same time was having fun and didn't take things too seriously—despite his destiny, and despite the other complications that go along with his storyline, in the game and in the movie. I thought: "Oh, I can really do something with this." This is a story that's really based around character. And because the Prince in the videogame is also a great character, always commenting in quippy little ways.

Were you familiar with the *Prince of Persia* franchise before the movie came to you?

Well, I played *Prince of Persia*—the original Jordan Mechner side-scrolling version—when I was a kid, and then I took a pretty long hiatus. *It* took a pretty long hiatus, but I took an even longer hiatus. And when we started talking about the movie, I got the game and started checking it out, seeing what it was like. And the coolest thing about it, I thought, was that as an actor, the things that the Prince does in the game were viable in reality, in a way. I mean, I don't think I can picture myself dragging my arm against the wall and running a thousand feet above the city, but I think it could be translated. His powers can be translated into reality. And the game gave the movie an opportunity to be grounded in some sort of reality.

I actually played *Sands of Time* while we were shooting, and I'd bring my stunt guys into the trailer and be like, "Check out this move, we should figure out how to do this, and how to do that..."

Was most of your prep work focused on the physical and the visual, as opposed to prepping psychologically for transforming into another character?

Yeah, you always have a different "in" to characters. This one, when you see the game, the Prince looks a certain way, so we had to try and morph me into that physically, in order to be faithful to the game. And at the same time I wanted to try and develop a more elaborate character and make it even clearer who this guy is. So he got a name, and we started to develop it that way. It was more physical than any movie I've ever done, particularly because there were these fighting sequences—I had never fought with swords or done any martial arts training or done any parkour training—integrated into a lot of the scenes. We would do improv stuff all the time: I remember one day, as one portion of a chase sequence, we had this alley that I had to get through—there were crates and boxes, and we had soldiers chasing after me, and there was a donkey. And I said, "What if we put the donkey in my way, and that's all I have to get over the wall as the bad guys come toward me from the opposite way?" It was always real—it wasn't like I was wearing a wire. We did it for real. Like if I had to make a choice to get out of [the situation] for real, with no wires, no tricks, how would I do it?

So in that moment at least, you were sort of playing the role of a videogame designer: creating a situation and figuring out what would be interesting for the viewer to watch you do. They're not controlling it, obviously, but they're living through you.

Yeah, I think that's what the danger's been for other videogame adaptations: What makes people want to

I actually played *Sands of Time* while we were shooting, and I'd be like, "Check out this move, we should figure out how to do that..."

go see a movie about something that they can have total control over? What would differentiate a movie from a game? Because this videogame franchise is so amazing and so popular, why not just stay at home and play it there? Why go see a movie about it? And for us it was, one, that movies are incredible when the story is awesome—I don't think there's another medium that can top it. And two, because there's an actual person there, it forces you to confront it realistically: What would I actually do in this situation?

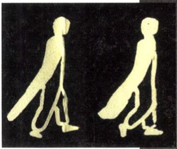
We know plenty of *Prince of Persia* fans who can't wait for this film. But why should someone who knows nothing about *PoP* care about the movie?

We always tried to respect the game: I'd be with the stunt coordinators and the director and the second unit director and Jerry [Bruckheimer]. I remember there's one chase sequence where I'm running and I'm hopping from post to post, much like the Prince does, but the Prince in the game would do bigger jumps. But for the storyline in the movie, the Prince had to start with smaller jumps, and then as he learns more, he can do more. So that had a story to it, just like each level in the game has a story to it. So anyway, he does this jump, and then I did this flip back around, landing on my feet. And I remember Jerry saying, "I don't know why he does that flip. I want to know why he does that flip. I don't want him to just do a flip." And I was like, "That's amazing." So we had to come back and put different things in the way, and we also had to have a *reason* for that flip in the story. So everything that is action in this movie is connected to an emotional, character-, or story-based motivation—which I think differentiates it from most of the videogame adaptations I've ever seen.

Everything has meaning—someone can watch a *story*, not just watch moves that they've seen or performed [in the game] at home. The game's moves are amazing, but why does the Prince perform them? And the movie-making medium has given us a way to define why he does them, hopefully giving the videogame even more depth, and vice versa.

Kingmaker

A true power lurks behind every throne. For *Prince of Persia,* it is creator Jordan Mechner



Twenty years ago, Jordan Mechner was trying to get away from making *Prince of Persia* the videogame, in order to get himself to film school and learn how to make movies. Since then his franchise has grossed hundreds of millions of dollars (with more still on the way), as the Prince expanded into a game franchise, graphic novels, and, now, a feature film (Mechner has writer and executive producer credits on the movie). We spoke to Mechner about the Prince's enduring nature, how to make a game work as a movie, and why it doesn't make sense to turn *everyone* into sand monsters.

When you first imagined *Prince of Persia* two decades ago, were you thinking about it along cinematic lines? In other words, was the game's narrative more of a vehicle for your game ideas and mechanics, or were you imagining something that you could actually see fleshed out as, say, a feature film?

Jordan Mechner: I always thought *PoP* would make a good movie, even when I was making the original game on the Apple II in the 1980s. But, in my wildest dreams I couldn't have envisioned that it would become a movie of the epic scale that Jerry Bruckheimer and Mike Newell have delivered.

Part of what drew me to making games, as a kid, was that I saw it as a way to create stories, to draw the player into an imaginary world with human characters. This was something new at the time and exciting to me. That said, when I write a game story, I always begin with the gameplay and game mechanics and then develop the storyline and characters to support that. The stories of the original game and *Sands of Time* were never designed to stand on their own like a movie; they're interwoven with the gameplay.

Over the last several *PoP* incarnations, the games and characters have exhibited a variety of different style aesthetics. Have you been involved with the series every step of the way, and how have you felt about the diverse range of looks it's assumed?

Part of what amazes me about *Prince of Persia* over the past 20 years is that it's gone so far beyond what I could encompass myself. The number of people who have worked on *PoP* projects—games, movies, books, and now toys, LEGOs—is beyond counting. There are versions of the game where I've only played the first couple of levels, and some I haven't played at all. It's staggering to think that all this started with a little Apple II game. Of all the projects, of course, I feel closest to the ones I had a direct hand in creating, which are really only a handful: the first two side-scrolling games, *Sands of Time* the game, *Sands of Time* the movie, and the graphic novels. Those are like my children, whereas with the others, I feel more like an uncle, or maybe a great-uncle.

What was your involvement with the newest *Prince of Persia* game?

I didn't work on it, but it's coming from the Ubisoft Montreal studio that I worked with closely on the first *Sands of Time* game. What I've seen looks exciting, and I'm looking forward to it.

In adapting *PoP* for film, did you attempt to preserve the "feel" of the games (or of games in general), or did you take more of a "clean slate" approach to the movie?

Movies and games are very different storytelling art forms. What's fun to play isn't necessarily fun to watch. That's why in adapting *PoP* from game into movie, I based it on *The Sands of Time* game, but didn't follow the game story literally. For example, turning everyone but the three main characters into sand creatures and giving the hero the ability to constantly refill the dagger were story points created to support the gameplay constraints. It worked wonderfully in the game, but I didn't think it was the strongest choice for a film.

You started as a game developer, then transitioned to feature film. Do you favor one over the other?

I love making games, and making movies, and making graphic novels. They all have their own special challenges and rewards, and their own brand of magic. I'd hate to give any of them up, but I would say that film, to me, feels somehow more primal. Movies have held me spellbound since childhood, before I could read, before I'd ever seen a videogame. For me, making movies feels almost like a basic urge, rather than an acquired one.

Across its various incarnations, the franchise has lasted a remarkably long time. What is it about *Prince of Persia* that has made it endure?

There seems to be something about the core idea of *PoP* that's unusually resilient and enduring. Maybe because it's rooted in the tales of the *One Thousand and One Nights,* which are stories that have been told and retold over thousands of years with narrators often changing the details to suit their tastes. *PoP* is really an ancient story merged with state-of-the-art technology to produce a very modern, cinematic kind of physical action. ■

WHAT'S NEXT FOR JORDAN MECHNER ↘

SOLOMON'S THIEVES
"A swashbuckling adventure set in 14th century Paris, the time of the Knights Templar. It's coming out in May from First Second Books."

FATHOM
"I'm writing the screenplay for a feature film adaptation of *Fathom,* starring Megan Fox, based on the comic books created by the late Michael Turner; that's set up at Fox."

KARATEKA
"I'm working on a relaunch of *Karateka,* the Apple II game I made before *Prince of Persia*. That's an exciting project. *Karateka's* been untouched for 25 years, and I look forward to being able to give you more details about that very soon!"

For the latest details on Mechner's work, check out his website, JordanMechner.com.

www.fileradar.net

OLETO
TICKET

DEMOS

MODS

PATCHES

EXPAND GAMIN

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G KNOWLEDGE

ⓧ HEAVY RAIN

◎ GET EVERY TROPHY

HEAVY RAIN

GET EVERY TROPHY

WARNING

HEAVY RAIN

SPOILERS AHEAD

SEE EVERY ENDING

GET EVERY TROPHY AND ENDING WITH OUR 100% GUIDE TO *HEAVY RAIN*

No one game of *Heavy Rain* is the same. With its branching structure, multiple endings, and points at which your character can actually *die,* seeing everything requires a lot of trial and error—or rather, it used to. Our 100 percent guide will not only help you nail *Heavy Rain's* elusive Platinum Trophy, but ensure you see every ending possible.

DO I NEED TO PLAY THE ENTIRE GAME AGAIN TO GET EVERY TROPHY?

No. *Heavy Rain* only allows one save at a time, and keeps a permanent timeline of your choices. If you jump into an early chapter, make significant changes to the plot, and decide to save, all following chapters will be affected, allowing you to change the ending. Don't worry about making a permanent "mistake"—you can replay and save scenes as often you like. It's also possible to obtain some "non-timeline" Trophies (such as making the omelette) by choosing not to enable automatic saving when you load up the section.

PROLOGUE

HAPPY BIRTHDAY (BRONZE)

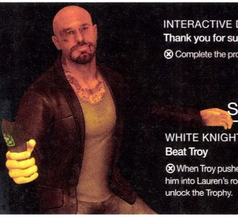
Complete the drawing + Set the table + Play with kids

⊗ Walk to your office and complete all stages of the house plan. You'll know you've finished them all when Ethan signs his name.
△ Slowly place the plates on the table without breaking them.
◎ Play with the kids. When you have one on your shoulders, make sure you complete a whole lap of the garden.

INTERACTIVE DRAMA (BRONZE)

Thank you for supporting interactive drama

⊗ Complete the prologue.

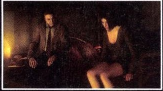


SLEAZY PLACE

WHITE KNIGHT (BRONZE)

Beat Troy

⊗ When Troy pushes past you in the hallway, follow him into Lauren's room. Win the fight sequence to unlock the Trophy.



PRIVATE EYE (BRONZE)

Lead Lauren to talk about her son

⊗ Choose the following dialogue options when they appear during Lauren's interview, in order: "Compassionate," then "Trick."

CRIME SCENE

FBI INVESTIGATOR (BRONZE)

Find all clues related to the Origami Killer in the scene

⊗ Follow the orchid pollen trail with the ARI (R1) to the muddy hill.
△ Climb the muddy hill and scan the tire tracks.
◎ Scan every clue around the kid's body under the tent.

THE PARK

GOOD FRIENDS (BRONZE)

Play two games with Shaun successfully and buy him candy

⊗ Throw the boomerang with Shaun by investigating his backpack by the bench.
△ Push Shaun on the swings, or play on the seesaw or the carousel.
◎ Buy Shaun some candy from the vendor near the merry-go-round.

WELCOME, NORMAN!

GOT TO REMEMBER! (BRONZE)

Remember what time it was at the park and what Shaun was wearing

⊗ When asked the time, pick 4:15 p.m.
△ When asked about his clothes, pick "beige coat" and "green pants."

HASSAN'S SHOP

NEGOTIATOR (BRONZE)

Persuade the robber to leave

⊗ Either get caught trying to sneak up on the robber, or approach him.
△ Put your hands up and tell him to calm down.
◎ Tell him your name, then ask him to put the gun down.

> "THE 'INTERACTIVE DRAMA' TROPHY IS A WAY TO THANK PEOPLE FOR THEIR SUPPORT. BUYING THE GAME WAS LIKE VOTING FOR THE INDUSTRY TO CHANGE AND EVOLVE"
>
> —**David Cage on *Heavy Rain's* infamous first Trophy**

NATHANIEL

BLUNDER (BRONZE)

Shoot Nathaniel

⊗ Press R1 to shoot Nathaniel.

SELF CONTROL (BRONZE)

Do not shoot Nathaniel

⊗ Do not press R1 to shoot Nathaniel.

SUICIDE BABY

BABY MASTER (BRONZE)

Make no mistakes taking care of the baby

⊗ Wash your hands.
△ Change the diaper and prepare the bottle.
◎ Rock the baby to sleep and put her back in the crib. Any mistakes (like making too sudden a movement and waking the baby) will lose you the Trophy.

THE BEAR

KAMIKAZE (BRONZE)

Choose the best path on the highway

⊗ Follow this *exact* path during the trial: left, right, left, left at the barrier, right at the cars, right, right at the toll booth, right, then left.
△ Make sure you avoid hitting the police car by tilting the controller to the right.

GOOD DRIVER (BRONZE)

Complete the bear trial successfully

⊗ Finish the trial. You can make a few mistakes, but too many and you'll crash and fail.

"IT'S A DEPRESSING SITUATION. IT'S ANTI-GAME"

—David Cage on "Father and Son"

FATHER AND SON

GOOD FATHER (BRONZE)

Follow the schedule with Shaun and put him to bed in a good mood

⊗ Give Shaun a snack at 4:30. Chips from the cupboard, or an orange from the fruit bowl.
△ At 6:00, make Shaun do his homework, even if he protests. Check it when he's done.
○ At 7:00, ask Shaun if he wants dinner. Then go to the fridge and choose pizza or chicken.
□ At 8:00 tell Shaun he has to go to bed.
L1 Fetch his Teddy from the laundry room next to the kitchen. Give it to him, then tuck him in.

PAPARAZZI

VIP (BRONZE)

Leave home without being spotted by the journalists

⊗ Exit through the back door of Ethan's house and jump over the fence to the right.
△ Go through the alleyway, get into your car and drive away.

LEXINGTON STATION

AGORAPHOBIA (BRONZE)

Knock down at least 50 passers-by

⊗ When everyone freezes during Ethan's panic attack, knock 50 people over by running into them. You only have a short period of time to do this.

LUCKY LOCKER (BRONZE)

Find the correct locker on first try

⊗ Go to row 18 and find locker 3. It's at the top.

COVERED MARKET

CAT & MOUSE (BRONZE)

Beat Korda in the cold storage

⊗ Hit all the prompts to beat Korda.

KRAMER'S PARTY

TOUGH GUY (BRONZE)

Defeat Gordi's bodyguards

⊗ Hit all the prompts to beat the bodyguards.

THE BUTTERFLY

COWARD! (BRONZE)

Give up or fail the butterfly trial

⊗ After crawling through the broken glass, exit through the "coward" door.

ELECTRIFIED (BRONZE)

Complete the butterfly trial successfully

⊗ Crawl through the broken glass slowly to avoid taking too much damage.
△ Navigate the electric fences. Look for the ones without a current going through them.

SHRINK AND PUNCHES

GOOD COP (BRONZE)
Stop Blake from hitting Dupre

⊗ Intervene before Blake hits the psychiatrist.

BAD COP (BRONZE)
Do not stop Blake from hitting Dupre

⊗ Stand back and don't interfere with Blake's interrogation.

THE DOC

SMART GIRL (BRONZE)
Do not drink the doc's beverage

⊗ Accept the drink, but don't take a sip when prompted.

QUEEN OF ROPES (BRONZE)
Escape before the doc returns

⊗ When the doorbell rings, follow the prompts to break free of the ropes with the drill.

THE SHARK

I'M A KILLER! (BRONZE)
Kill the drug dealer

⊗ When given the option to save or kill the dealer, shoot him.

I'M NOT A KILLER! (BRONZE)
Do not kill the drug dealer

⊗ Don't shoot the dealer. Avoid his shotgun blasts until the scene ends.

MAD JACK

GOODBYE MAD JACK (BRONZE)
Survive the fights against Mad Jack

⊗ Search the garage until you find the acid bath. This will start a fight.
△ During the fight, ignore the option to take the triptocane.
◎ You'll wake up in your car heading for the crusher. Survive the battle to get the Trophy.

EUREKA

THE CHEF (BRONZE)
Prepare a good omelette on time

⊗ Get the eggs from the fridge and place the pan on the stove.
△ Crack the eggs into the pan and stir them until they're no longer transparent.
◎ Remove the eggs from the stove before Lauren gets out of the shower.

THE OLD WAREHOUSE

SIMPLE MIND (BRONZE)
Save the Origami Killer before he falls

⊗ During the fight on the conveyor belt, the killer will slip. Choose to rescue him.

SO CLOSE... (BRONZE)
Reach the end with all characters...and fail

⊗ Let Jayden die on the conveyor belt battle.
△ Fail Madison's motorcycle sequence.
◎ Put Shaun down to open the door.

KILLER'S PLACE

COLD AS ICE (BRONZE)
Survive the explosion by hiding in the fridge

⊗ Make your way through the fire into the kitchen.
△ Remove everything from the fridge, then get inside to escape the blast.

> "IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT STRESS OR FEAR, IT'S ALSO ABOUT EMPATHY AND MAKING YOU FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE"
>
> —David Cage on emotions

NON SCENE-SPECIFIC

FOUR HEROES (SILVER)
Complete the story with four characters alive

⊗ Finish the game with Ethan, Madison, Jayden, and Shaun alive.
△ Ethan must avoid arrest and figure out the address of the warehouse from the clues.
◎ Madison must survive the scene in the doctor's basement, find the address on the laptop and escape the burning apartment.
▣ Jayden must survive the Mad Jack encounter, and either find the killer's identity by locating all of the ARI clues (see "Nerd") or getting a call from Madison.

HEAVY RAIN HERO (BRONZE)
Finish *Heavy Rain*

⊗ Finish the game with any ending.

TRIAL MASTER (SILVER)
Succeed in all Ethan's trials

⊗ Drive for five miles down the wrong side of the highway without failing.
△ Get through the broken glass and *all* of the electric fences.
◎ Cut off your finger.
▣ Kill the drug dealer.
L1 Drink the poison.

NERD (SILVER)
Find all clues using ARI and find the Origami Killer

⊗ Scan *every* clue in all three crime scenes (the wasteland, Mad Jack's junkyard, and the office in the Blue Lagoon) and combine them to discover the killer's identity back at police HQ.

SAVED THE KID (SILVER)
Save Shaun

⊗ Save Shaun from the warehouse as either Ethan, Madison, or Jayden.

PERFECT CRIME (GOLD)
Clean Manfred's shop of evidence + Let Lauren, Hassan, and Kramer die + Kill Madison and Jayden

⊗ See instructions for "Ending 07."

ALL ENDINGS (GOLD)
See all endings

⊗ See every possible ending (see endings guide).

THE LIZARD

GOLD FINGER (BRONZE)
Cut your finger using the axe, knife, or pliers + Disinfect or cauterize the wound

⊗ Collect the disinfectant from the bathroom cabinet, then the axe, knife, or pliers, and put them on the table.
△ Find the iron rod, then heat it up on the gas stove and put it on the table too.
◎ Sit down and use the disinfectant, then cut your finger off with your chosen tool.
▣ Use the heated iron rod on the wound to cauterize it.

BUTCHER (BRONZE)
Cut your finger using the saw or scissors

⊗ Use the saw or scissors to cut your finger off, and don't cauterize or disinfect the wound.

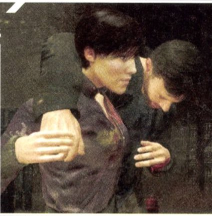
FUGITIVE

FUGITIVE (BRONZE)
Manage to escape Blake in the subway station

⊗ Follow all prompts to push through the traffic.
△ Go down the subway stairs then cross the tracks to escape.

HANDS UP! (BRONZE)
Get arrested by Blake

⊗ Either get caught in the subway station in this chapter, or let the SWAT team catch you at the motel in "On The Loose."



JAYDEN'S BLUES

LUDWIG VON (BRONZE)
Play the piano without a wrong note

⊗ Hit every prompt while Norman plays the piano.

DETOX (BRONZE)
Resist triptocane

⊗ Don't take the triptocane early on. In the office, choose the "resist" option, flush it in the hotel room.

UNDER ARREST

WISE GUY (BRONZE)
Switch the camera off in the surveillance room before saving Ethan

⊗ When Blake's finished his questioning, go opposite the interrogation room and switch off the video camera before busting Ethan out.

TWINS

I'M NOT SCARED! (BRONZE)
Follow your brother without making a mistake

⊗ Don't miss any prompts as you move through the building site.

SEXY GIRL

PRIDE SAVED (BRONZE)
Take off no more than one item of clothing during the striptease

⊗ Remove one piece of clothing, then select the option to grab the lamp to end the striptease.

ON THE LOOSE

REJECT
FORGIVE

UNFORGIVABLE (BRONZE)
Do not forgive Madison

⊗ When you discover Madison's real motives, don't forgive her.

LOVER BOY (BRONZE)
Forgive Madison

⊗ When you discover Madison's real motives, forgive her.

ESCAPE MASTER (BRONZE)
Escape the police at the motel

⊗ Evade the cops until you reach the roof of the motel.
△ When given the option, jump off the roof to escape.

TRAPPED

SWIMMING INSTRUCTOR (BRONZE)
Save Lauren under the water

⊗ Remove Lauren's seat belt *before* kicking the window.

FACE TO FACE

INVINCIBLE SCOTT (BRONZE)
Do not get shot in Kramer's villa

⊗ Don't miss *any* prompts during the action sequence.

KIND HEARTED (BRONZE)
Give Kramer his medicine

⊗ When Kramer has a heart attack, go over to his desk and pick up the medicine.
△ Walk over to Kramer and use the medicine.

THE RAT

SACRIFICE (BRONZE)
Drink the poison

⊗ Pick up the vial and drink the poison.

CLEVER DAD (BRONZE)
Work out where Shaun is held

⊗ Choose "852 Theodore Roosevelt Road" on Ethan's GPS. You can *only* get this Trophy if you've failed one or more of the trials.

ENDINGS GUIDE

ENDING 01
Epilogues: New Life, Origami's Grave, Case Closed

⊗ In "Killer's Place" find the warehouse address and escape the blaze, call Ethan and tell him where the warehouse is located.
△ In "The Old Warehouse," Let Ethan save Shaun, get Madison to tell him about the police outside, get Jayden to kill Shelby, but save him from death by pulling him up when he slips.

ENDING 02
Epilogues: Innocent, Heroine, Resignation

⊗ Find the warehouse address on the laptop, escape the apartment and don't call anyone.
△ Have Madison save Shaun and Shelby survive the fight.

ENDING 03
Epilogues: Ethan's Grave, Heroine, Unpunished

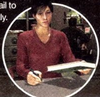
⊗ In "The Old Warehouse," fail every event. Jayden dies, Madison does not warn Ethan about the police and he's shot dead.

ENDING 04
Epilogues: Helpless, Square One, A Mother's Revenge

⊗ Don't kiss Madison in "On The Loose" and get caught by the SWAT team by not jumping off the building at the end.
△ Don't let Lauren die in "Trapped."
◎ Make Jayden fail to identify the killer in "Solving the Puzzle."
▣ In "Killer's Place," don't locate the address on the laptop and escape from the fire.

ENDING 05
Epilogues: Origami Blues, Smoking Mirror

⊗ Don't drink the poison in "The Rat" and fail to guess the address of the warehouse correctly.
△ Make Jayden give up the investigation.
◎ Kill Madison by failing to escape from the doctor's basement.



ENDING 06
Epilogues: Tears in Rain

⊗ In "Killer's Place," don't locate the address on the laptop and escape from the fire.

ENDING 07
Epilogues: New Life, Origami's Grave, Case Closed

⊗ Let the robber kill Hassan, the shop keeper. Let Ethan get arrested in Fugitive.
△ Wipe away *all* of the fingerprints in Manfred's antiques shop. Forgive Madison after discovering her secret.
◎ Do not give Kramer his heart medicine. Do not save Lauren when you're escaping from the car underwater.
▣ When controlling Madison or Jayden in the penultimate scene, fail to follow the prompts when confronted by the Origami Killer.
R1 If Jayden or Madison died in earlier scenes, ignore step 4.

TESTING the Mettle

A tale of quality assurance

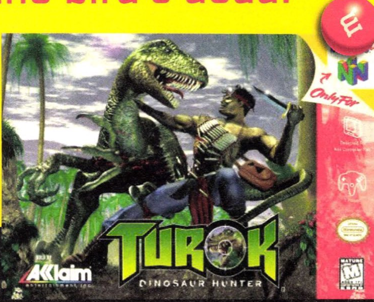
By Russell Garbutt

Welcome to the dream:
A position testing videogames.

Welcome to the reality:
No matter how it happens—via nepotism or won on a PlayStation Network-aired reality show such as *The Tester*—all game testing jobs are for companies with bottom lines, quarterly earnings, corporate power struggles, and potentially sociopathic colleagues. If what is past is truly prologue, then the following story of one game tester should serve to strengthen the resolve of anyone who starts tomorrow, has an interview next week, or who may consider selling his soul on a reality show to get into the gaming business. All may not be what it seems and the lesson to be learned is that quality assurance does not necessarily mean an assurance of quality.

My name is Russell, and I was a tester for a company whose games were almost as painful as *Jigsaw's* in the *SAW* movies, and whose HR standards were eerily similar.

"I got the job... And the bird's dead."



THE INTERVIEW

It had gone well for me. The application form seemed more like an essay on what I did that winter. I listed both my favorite and most recent games and then proceeded to write a detailed paragraph about why, on that warm, spring day, I had shown up to the interview at (the now defunct) Acclaim Entertainment's Quality Assurance department in Long Island, N.Y. I was even wearing a semi-expensive suit, one this newspaper depot worker could ill-afford. I was dressed for business and had just written my manifesto. *It was in the bag.*

John, the man who was conducting the interview, had read what I had written and was pleased with what he had learned. There was also a bit of verbal quizzing that I passed with flying colors. The interview ended with a handshake and John uttering the words, *"You're definitely a gamer."* He then assured me I would be hearing from him soon, just after he had gone over all the applicants with his co-manager, Trey. Just as I was about to get up and leave, I was forced to recoil in my seat as a new, rubber-smelling basketball sailed past. With a metallic bang it smashed into the filing cabinet on my right before completing its return bounce into the hands of the man who threw it.

"I'm Trey," he said, standing in the doorway wearing cut-off jean shorts and a basketball jersey that was so small on him it revealed his entire stomach, hair and all. "You ball?"

"No, I don't," I replied, my heart still racing from the incident. "I'm here for a QA interview... I'd like to be a..." my voice trailed off, as the sight of Trey's outie navel swaying in rhythm with the bouncing basketball was almost hypnotic. I couldn't even remember why I was there.

"Too bad," Trey snapped. "I'm the boss around here, and we always ball. Helps with the thinking." Trey had pronounced "thinking" as if it rhymed with "Lincoln." "I'll be back in an hour, John."

Trey then lifted his right leg into the air and released what would be known today as a Peter Griffin-sized explosion of gas. He then ran off, chuckling to himself. The thuds of the dribbling ball could be heard through the walls of the offices.

DEATH OR GLORY OR MAYBE BOTH

Exactly eight days later, the phone rang. My mother had a blue-and-white parakeet that always started chirping and warbling at the sound of the ringing phone. I made a mad dash for the cordless, which just happened to be on the arm of the couch next to the birdcage. On the other end of the phone was John from Acclaim, calling to inform me I was hired. Just hearing those words filled my imagination with scenes of games, accolades, industry parties, and a long, fruitful career of artistic creation and commercial success.

I thanked John for the opportunity and hung up the phone. The beep the cordless made when hanging up usually got the most melodic reaction from the bird, so I moved closer to the cage so the little creature could hear it. Instead of the usual series of musical chirps, the parakeet let out a squawk and a gurgle and dropped to the bottom of the cage. At that exact moment my father walked into the room.

"I got the job," I told my father. "And the bird's dead."

Testers at Acclaim were given two choices of shifts. The day shift ran 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., and the night shift ran 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. I picked the day shift and, anxious to get started, showed up early and parked my car in the lot of the main building on Glen Street. I was informed shortly thereafter that the QA department was actually in the building across the street, away from what became known as "Acclaim Proper." Testers were also supposed to park our cars in the three-story garage down the street, as the main building's lot was reserved for executives, associates, and "honored guests."

Once I got inside the other building, I was issued a door badge and everyone starting work that day was corralled into a meeting room with a round table, where we would sit and do basically nothing...for six days. Training, they called it.

Over the course of the next half-year the games Acclaim put out varied in quality from good to abysmal. The majority of the time was spent testing games that fell into the latter category. Testers would videotape their play sessions vigilantly and write up any bugs they encountered on pre-designed forms that left a space to insert the videotape's time marker to note when the incident occurred. Testers would come into work, sign in, and check the roster for what game they would be testing with which project leader. Day in, day out for months at a time I would end up playing...er, "testing" the same game for eight hours a day, five days a week, plus the occasional weekend. Most think testing is a gamer's dream job, but when you're working on a project

UNDERTAKER
99
UNDERTAKER
WINS: 00
MATCH 01
BEST 2 OUT OF 3 FALLS
ROUND

PlayStation
DRAGONHEART
FIRE & STEEL
THE DARK AGES JUST GOT DARKER
TEEN
Acclaim

Left to right: Acclaim's testers were sequestered in this building across the street from the company's HQ. *Turok* rocked, and *Wrestlemania* rolled, but mostly Acclaim games were abominable like *Dragonass: Sh-t and Stink.*

like *Iron Man & X-O Manowar in Heavy Metal* for the Game Boy Color, the mind is the first thing to go, and quickly. Not all was grim, however, as a few titles managed to stand out in terms of quality: *Wrestlemania: The Arcade Game* (PlayStation/Saturn), *Mortal Kombat II* (PlayStation), *NBA Jam* (Arcade/PlayStation), and *Alien Trilogy* (PlayStation).

Acclaim also offered free pretzels, candy, and soda to all the testers every day, and free pizza lunches on Friday. For a while, I was doing just fine.

Some of the titles Acclaim was cranking out in those days were so unbelievably bad that one thing became painfully obvious: Most of the titles were being created strictly over licensing deals. The quality of the games rapidly took a back seat to slapping Batman (or what have you) on the box cover. Acclaim's games had stopped selling, with the exception of the World Wrestling Federation-licensed titles. The writing was on the wall.

There was endless sh-t to be shoveled. Testers took to the work like soldiers in a foxhole, transforming game titles into something more crudely apropos as a coping mechanism. *Dragonheart* became *Dragonass. Space Jam* was rechristened *Sh-tball.* And so it went.

I began to feel that my career with Acclaim was simply not meant to be. Trey, the eccentric co-manager of the office, had been let go from the company for *(wait for it…)* taking testers out to play basketball.

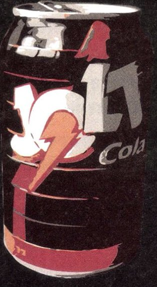
The soda, candy, and pretzels were the next to go.

BENT AND BROKEN

I didn't mind being surrounded by coworkers who were mentally unhinged. I didn't mind the fact the guy behind me would continually dance around his chair Boyz II Men-style, or when the project lead of a game on deadline walked around the place in a zombie-like state for a month after the death of Kurt Cobain. I even rejoiced when the guy next to me proposed to his girlfriend via a *Duke Nukem* map he'd created, writing "Marry Me" in blood all over its stone walls. These were the good times, this was the beginning of a satisfying career…and the Twizzlers were free.

It was at this point of nirvana (no pun intended) that things at Acclaim really started to go bad.

Beyond the rapid plummet of Acclaim's game quality, not all of the awful things to happen were about the products. Rumors began that layoffs were imminent. Several bizarre incidents occurred at the company that made matters worse...



Acclaim's CEO was showing a set of Japanese investors around the company. It was assumed this was with a view toward drumming up financing. He had managed to bring them into the QA department at the very moment the morning shift was changing to the evening shift. He had no idea why there wasn't anyone working and began to yell, "I demand to know why everyone is on a break!" The resulting shockwave was felt throughout QA for months.

Later, all the staff was brought into Acclaim's seldom-used but enormously expensive and oversized motion-capture studio for a meeting. It was then the CEO and his founding partner told us all that there would be layoffs. They were clearly doing good cop/bad cop, as one was apologetic and the other offered no apologies for anything they were doing or about to do. After informing all staff that some of us "might" be losing our jobs, they filed us outside for pizza...of which there wasn't enough for everyone. The "bad cop" founder left the company shortly thereafter.

I knew it was over. I began the unthinkable: hunting for another job. I was successful after only a month, and it was a job that paid much better and offered a lot more security...but it was not in the gaming business.

The average salary for a game tester in 1996 was $9 an hour. Acclaim paid $8 to its part-time, temporary testers and offered them no benefits beyond terrible free pizza. Things are much different now, as the whole landscape of videogames in general has changed radically. I had been hired as a full-time Acclaim employee, working eight-hour shifts five (to seven) days a week. These days it seems that many companies hire their testers on a job-by-job basis and not as contractual employees, farming them out to whatever developer they're working with at the time. It's possible to make a lot more money at it these days, but testers have to constantly hustle themselves like salesmen. More experienced testers can make a pretty decent living if they are willing to put in the time testing and, sometimes more importantly, networking.

That said, testing is not, anywhere, the glorious experience that we might have been lead to believe from recent shows like *The Tester.* Despite surviving the physical challenge of having to dodge an errant basketball during my initial interview, I never LARPed or rolled in a giant hamster ball or even formed a secret alliance. I did, however, suffer for my passion. Indeed, as testing has proven, sometimes the greatest prize can also be the gravest indignity. ■

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LOST PLANET 2

Of Mechs and Men

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Capcom DEVELOPER: Capcom

Towering alien monsters. Giant mechanical suits. Gorgeous environments to conquer with friends. *Lost Planet 2* takes every element required to create an amazing shooter and stirs them into one overwhelming experience packed with plenty of spectacular battles and awesome moments. ➔

➔ But for nearly every aspect of the game, awesomeness comes with a caveat. The shooting mechanics are responsive, intuitive...and annoying as hell. The run-and-gun style works just fine—as long as we never let a bullet touch us. When that happens, we're frozen in place, unable to heal or dive for cover (not that it would do much good since we have to hold the crouch button to duck and it's impossible to shoot over obstacles).

This might not be so terrible if the enemies didn't take an eternity to kill. Running full bore at a bad guy while emptying a clip into his chest is exciting, but our enthusiasm waned in the face of our enemies' unnatural ability to absorb the bullets from our weak firearms. Even the weapons we pulled off mechs felt underpowered—though it's possible all the recoil just made them inaccurate. The only times we felt powerful were those fleeting moments spent inside a Vital Suit, which, by the way, are badass.

Then there are the idiosyncratic controls. Hold the start button to heal? Press the triangle and L1 buttons to switch between grenades and the ally-healing energy gun? And boy did we get frustrated with the weapon-select button. On more than one occasion, we could be heard screaming, "No seriously, switch weapons!" while pounding the triangle button. We still managed to have fun running through rich environments and shooting gruff-looking bad guys in the face (especially when we got to jump into one of the aforementioned mechs), but the bizzaro controls made it trickier.

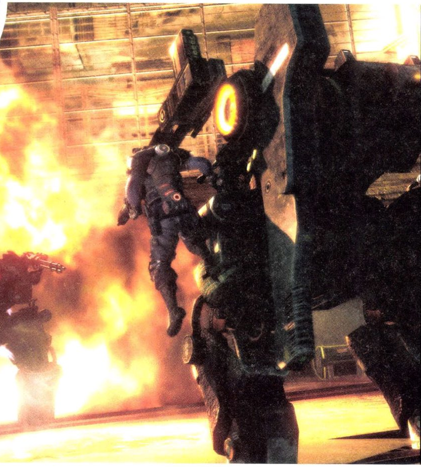
Bullets, my only weakness!

The main campaign isn't built around a single linear narrative. Instead, each of the game's six episodes follows a different group from various planetary factions fighting for resources and/or attempting to avert an environmental catastrophe on the distant and recently thawed planet E.D.N. III. The plot develops beyond this loose premise...but only slightly.

Instead of story, the campaign focuses on statistics: kill

↗ Don't be fooled by the convoluted battle gauge. It's basically a shared "extra life" system.

" The shooting mechanics are responsive, intuitive... and annoying as hell. The run-and-gun style works just fine—as long as we never let a bullet touch us. **"**



↙ Mech-on-Mech Action

In addition to the main cooperative campaign, *Lost Planet 2* offers a full competitive multiplayer component. As with the campaign, it's a healthy mix of positives and negatives. On the good side, we've got guns, mechs, and an assortment of classic modes like team deathmatch and capture the egg...er, flag. And the bad? Many of the basic gameplay annoyances—players being shot are paralyzed until they're no longer being hit—show up here as well, and some of the modes are poorly explained or just don't make sense.

In the two-vs.-all "VIP" mode, the fugitives have to survive for a certain amount of time, but the time isn't displayed on the screen. In the capture the flag mode, players have to wander blindly until they find a data post. And in the timed hold-the-position mode, certain maps have only *one* data post to capture, which leads to crazy camping. *Planet 2's* multiplayer serves as a welcome diversion for those who already own the game, but it's not a compelling reason to buy in and of itself.

↘ Know your enemy

↑ This massive salamander proves to be one of the easier category-G Akrid battles in the game, despite his massive size. He's slow, so as long as a hero doesn't get stepped on, taking him down requires nothing more than a lot of patience. (Hey, those fat stumpy legs grow back, you know.)

↑ This monstrosity can best be described as a desert shark. He swims through the sand alongside the hero's newly commandeered bullet train; fire the train's massive canon into his gaping maw to finish him off. (Of course, we didn't know that the first time and had to repeat the entire mission.)

← These jungle pirates are encountered early in the game. Think of them as cannon fodder, perfect for target practice before squaring off against all the bigger beasties.

↙ Find this pair of fearsome-looking Akrid in the first of the game's two desert sections. Their sonic scream attacks seem impossible to avoid, but the large weak spots on their chests are easy targets. Take them down as quickly as possible.

↙ Even in dramatic scenarios like this, it's necessary to perform all the same actions over and over again.

> Fortunately, being able to whore statistics with up to three friends makes the experience far more worthwhile.

streaks, completion times, random sub-objectives (from dispatching every enemy in a room to simply breaking windows)—the game tracks it all. It even scores players' overall performance and tabulates any special awards earned at the end of each mission. For some gamers, this throwback to old-school statistics whoring might provide all the motivation required to play *Planet 2*. For us, it's not quite enough.

That's just part of why the campaign feels empty. Without a protagonist to anchor the experience or a story to drive the action, *Planet 2* becomes a slow grind through a disjointed series of rooms, all of which are roughly the same. The game occasionally introduces compelling new scenarios (think high-speed energy canon fight), but the majority of the campaign is spent activating and defending data posts—which is exactly as uninspired as it sounds. Even the spectacular monster battles grow tiresome since each fight lasts 10 minutes or so without evolving.

And when momentum actually does emerge during the campaign, the loading screens and end-of-mission stat summaries popping up every 15 minutes immediately squelch it. But what really baffles us is that it's impossible to save at the end of a mission—only at the end of a complete chapter (which might crop up once every half hour).

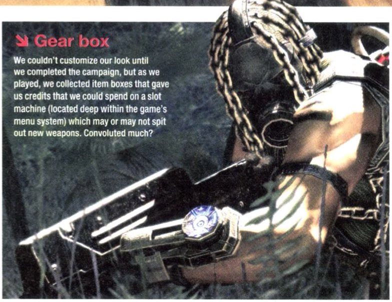
So while the mech-flying, monster-fighting gameplay is solid throughout, *Planet 2's* structure makes the game feel unsubstantial—more like a bonus multiplayer mode than a deep campaign. Focusing on stats instead of story is a legitimate approach, but it requires a better execution, not *Planet 2's* middle-of-the-road shooting. If a game requires several playthroughs to reach its full potential, its action better be flawlessly executed, continuously compelling, and perhaps even over-the-top (like, say, *Bayonetta*) to keep us playing.

There's no AI in team

Fortunately, being able to whore statistics with up to three friends makes the experience far more worthwhile. When an oversized Akrid springs out of a jungle lake and we're able to scream at our coworkers to flank the scary bastard, problems like wacky control schemes and dull mission objectives suddenly fade away. Really, any time a game slaps a rifle in our hands and turns us loose on a long and varied succession of dramatically oversized alien monsters, we're bound to enjoy ourselves, especially when our friends and family get to come along for the ride.

So is *Planet 2* worth playing solo? Yes, but not because of the useless artificial intelligence-controlled buddies or the mediocre shooting. Instead, we muddled through the singleplayer in order to get to the co-op play—it's impossible to join a friend's game unless *both* players have unlocked the mission they're tackling together. When we finally set off with other humans, we had a blast. We found plenty to love in *Lost Planet 2,* but still had to overlook an awful lot of problems to get there. | Scott Butterworth

Rating ★★★☆☆



↘ Gear box

We couldn't customize our look until we completed the campaign, but as we played, we collected item boxes that gave us credits that we could spend on a slot machine (located deep within the game's menu system) which may or may not spit out new weapons. Convoluted much?

3D DOT GAME HEROES

Retro done right

PS3 PRICE: **$39.99** ESRB: **Everyone 10+** PUBLISHER: **Atlus** DEVELOPER: **FromSoftware/Silicon Studio**

As with any indulgence, retro gaming can be a tricky thing. Too little, and we're left with a sepia-toned yearning for a bygone era before pixels begat polygons. Too much, though, and we're left uncomfortably bloated from a treacly extravagance well past its prime. This is the delicate balancing act faced by *3D Dot Game Heroes,* which isn't just an homage to decades-old *Zelda* games, but rather a direct knockoff of Shigeru Miyamoto's masterpieces—albeit with a few new tricks up its sleeve.

Don't believe us? Understandable. *This couldn't be as blatant as it appears,* we thought. After spending almost 20 hours exploring the verdant overmap (with pit stops in the dusky desert, the volcanic cliffs, and the sparkling seaside), spelunking through puzzle-packed dungeons, and fiddling away our evenings with meaningless yet inescapably diverting minigames, we still couldn't believe it…but we couldn't deny it, either. Even the music pays homage to Link and his 8- and 16-bit quests to defeat evil.

Dungeon Mastery

Everything about *Dot* feels familiar. The story is simple yet functional: Evil is back, and it's up to us to gather magic orbs from six dungeons in order to save the world. The gameplay is neatly broken up into digestible bits: Start in a town, head to a dungeon, solve puzzles and master challenges room by room before beating the end-boss, then make our way to the next dungeon, exploring the map along the way for hidden secrets and better loot. Even the inventory holds no surprises: We started with a sword and shield, then got a boomerang, bombs, bow and arrow, slingshot (er, "wire rod"), candles, and so on. We even had a fairy companion to help out.

Despite the new-school graphical sheen, complete with sleek high-res blocks, dazzling water reflections, and the most obsessively buffed dungeon floors in the history of dungeon-floor-buffing (just look at that shine!), *Dot* is basically the same game we played decades ago. Crave a bit of block-pushing? Head to any dungeon. Miss the joy of taking notes to remember what random item you need for which random villager, or which trigger you need to push five rooms over in order to open a path on the other side of the dungeon? *Dot's* got it covered.

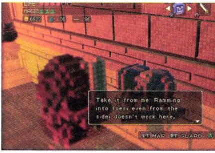
And yet the game feels fresh for two reasons: First, it's delightfully self-aware, with a sharp sense of humor and clever pacing. But perhaps the bigger reason for its success? How many games have directly copied *Zelda?* And we're not talking about merely borrowing bits and bobs—we mean a full-on clone.

In short, *3D Dot Game Heroes* is long overdue. More than two decades have passed since *Zelda's* release, and now's a great time to re-experience this classic style of gameplay.

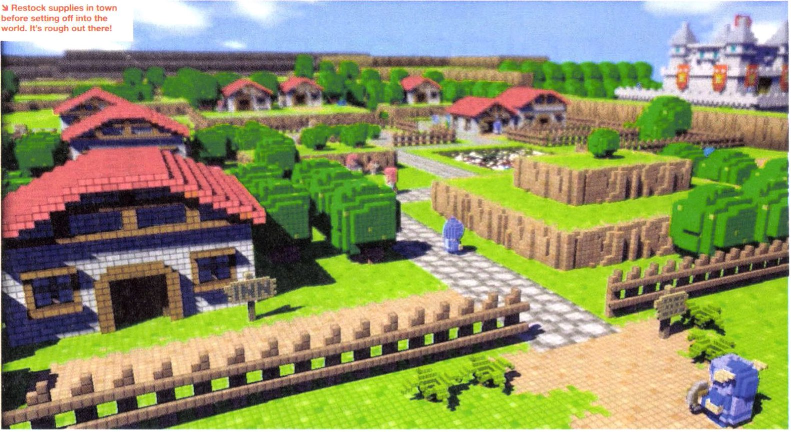
Blockheaded

So it's a retro game that still holds up. And it's charming enough to win over both old-school gamers and young'uns alike. What's not to love?

First, *Heroes* is a serious game for serious gamers, by which we mean



Take it from me: Ramming into foes, even from the side, doesn't work here.


↘ Restock supplies in town before setting off into the world. It's rough out there!

> **“ Despite the new-school graphical sheen, complete with sleek high-res blocks and dazzling water reflections, *Dot* is basically the same game we played decades ago. ”**

it gets *tough*. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but it does require a commitment. And, frankly, it's easier to commit to, say, Kratos than our blocky hero.

Next, control suffers in the transition to 3D. Our shield can only defend us from the front, and our sword can only slash where we're pointing, but because of our blocky avatars and the blocky obstructions, we often found ourselves getting walloped because we couldn't tell which direction we were facing. Coupled with an annoying tendency for our hero to not face the direction we're moving in, it's a recipe for frustration.

The biggest issue, though, is the simple fact that it's a retro game. *Heroes* is neither the original game we loved, nor a new game we can grow to adore on its own merits. It is, as a statement of fact, derivative, a constant reminder of an original it can never truly hope to top.

But perhaps it doesn't need to, because *Dot* brings enough new to the table, and delivers its homage with enough charm and character to make it worthy on its own merits. It dances on the tightrope stretched between under- and overindulgence, and puts on a fine performance all along the way. | Gary Steinman

Rating ★★★★☆

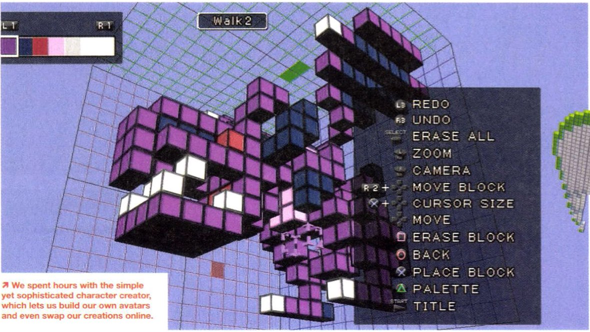
↘ Secret service

Like any classic game, *Dot* is loaded with goofy secrets. Three of our favorites:

FOWL OUT
Keep whacking a chicken, and our hero will eventually be pecked to death by a flock of angry birds.

LOAD UP
They're not just for staring at during load times. Each of these screens is an homage to a different classic game.

SIGN ON
Forget directions. Find enough signs, and our hero can become a sign master. Pointless fun!


↗ We spent hours with the simple yet sophisticated character creator, which lets us build our own avatars and even swap our creations online.

GTA: EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY

Last but not least

PS3 PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Rockstar Games DEVELOPER: Rockstar North

Oh that sweet, sweet sound. It's been two long years since *Grand Theft Auto IV* originally released, but just hearing that distinctive menu-select noise brings all those amazing memories flooding back. *Episodes From Liberty City* has given us a perfect excuse to return to a game that's absolutely worth replaying, and enough time has passed that revisiting the city feels fresh and exhilarating once more.

Of course, those two years of separation also mean certain aspects of the game feel dated. The graphics, for instance, suffer from blurry textures and the occasional pop-in. And since this is merely an extension of *GTA IV* and not an entirely new game, many of the old annoyances persist. The driving controls are still infuriatingly uncooperative, and the cover and shooting mechanics often feel clumsy and unsubstantial.

Nonetheless, *GTA IV* remains one of gaming's crowning achievements for its incredible scope, and with these brand new episodes, that scope has expanded even further. Each "episode" contained on the standalone disc offers a solid 10 to 12 hours of powerful story content (plus a nearly complete Liberty City to simply tool around in forever), which makes this package feel even more substantial than your average full-priced release.

The Lost and Damned

The first episode stars the hardened but likable Johnny Klebitz, vice president of a vicious, take-no-prisoners biker gang that's slowly torn apart by violence and betrayal. At times even grittier than *GTA IV* protagonist Niko Bellic's saga, Johnny's story is remarkably human and traverses a full and ultimately satisfying emotional arc (while subtly interweaving with the original story along the way).

As a badass biker, Johnny enjoys some enhanced motorcycle skills that make it easier to stay on a bike and blow people away with his uncharacteristically accurate sawed-off shotgun. The controls are still imperfect, but Johnny's unique attributes—coupled with the intense heavy metal soundtrack and the ability to summon biker brothers with a quick phone call—give *Lost and Damned* its own distinct feel. It definitely pulled us in and made us feel like badasses too.

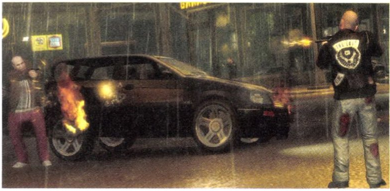
The missions are similar to *GTA IV's* (drive places, shoot people), but the creative scenarios fit well within the context of the story. Not every mission's a winner (driving all over the city to blow up vans is a drag), but the heart-stopping moments easily outnumber the duds. Plus, the "gang war" side-missions are loads of fun.

The Ballad of Gay Tony

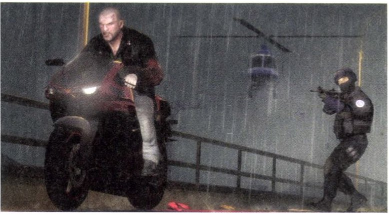
In stark contrast to the dark, dirty *Lost and Damned, The Ballad of Gay Tony* gets downright silly. The experience is still legitimately deep, but the action goes way over the top. The narrative is also lighter and funnier; rather than casting players as a hard-luck criminal, the story centers on Luis Lopez, a do-everything personal assistant for nightclub owner Tony Prince.

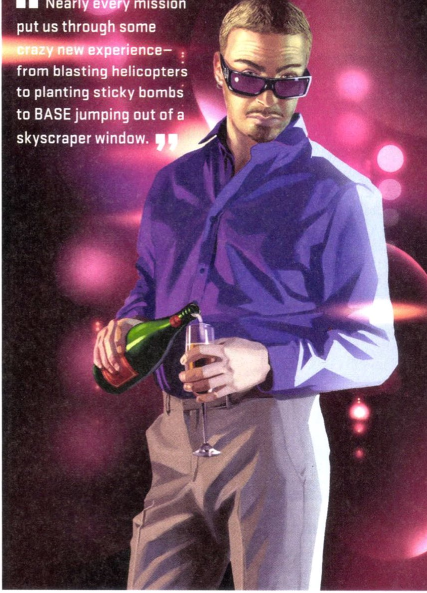
Unlike most other *GTA* heroes, Luis is a genuine good guy who simply gets caught up with the wrong people, and as a result, we were really pulling for him and his ridiculous ensemble of friends (who are now among our favorite characters in the entire series).

The real draw of *Gay Tony*, however, is the action. Nearly every mission put



↘ We almost never jacked or even drove a car as Johnny Klebitz. The bike just felt right.





> Nearly every mission put us through some crazy new experience—from blasting helicopters to planting sticky bombs to BASE jumping out of a skyscraper window.

us through some crazy new experience—from blasting helicopters from the sky with the electric shotgun to planting sticky bombs on passing cars to BASE jumping out of a skyscraper window and landing on a truck bed. Even the dance floor minigame in Tony's club proved to be quite the entertaining diversion.

Whether we were dancing with beautiful women in a nightclub or hitting the open road on a hog, *Episodes From Liberty City* provided a bounty of compelling experiences that completely renewed our love for *Grand Theft Auto*. With brilliant writing, fun new features, and a fresh look at the truly spectacular Liberty City, these episodes are proud and worthy additions to *GTA IV's* legacy. | Scott Butterworth

Rating ★★★★½

↘ Epi-showdown

Don't want to purchase the $40 standalone disc? Download the episodes separately for $20 each (provided you still have a copy of *GTA IV*). But if you've only got the cash for one, which episode do you pick?

STORY *Gay Tony's* cast is hilarious and endearing, but Johnny Klebitz's harrowing tale of betrayal, revenge, and redemption is a total tour de force. Plus, being a biker just feels badass.
WINNER: LOST AND DAMNED

MISSIONS Luis and company take this category hands down. The collection of activities is so diverse, fresh, and unexpected that beating up rival bike gangs can't compete.
WINNER: BALLAD OF GAY TONY

EXTRAS As fun as it may be to blast through traffic on a motorcycle with total confidence, the kickass weaponry and super-fun BASE jumping in *Gay Tony* have to be experienced.
WINNER: BALLAD OF GAY TONY

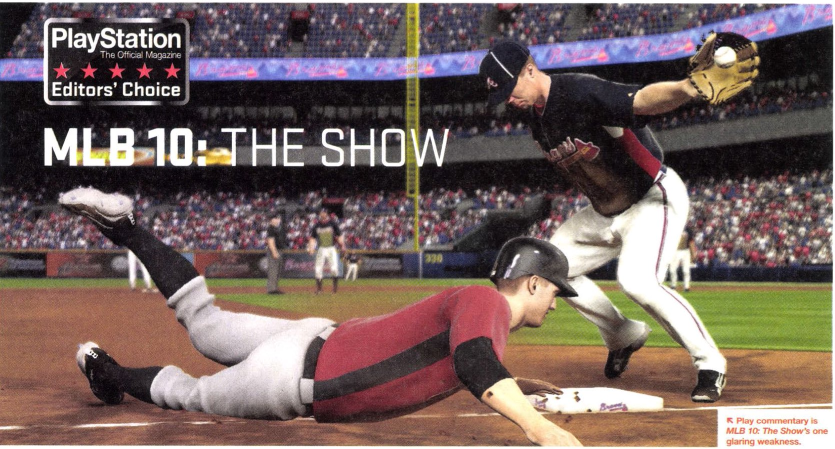
OUR PICK: BALLAD OF GAY TONY

← *GTA IV's* imperfect shooting and driving controls return unchanged.

LIVE CENTRAL
LIVE CENTR

PlayStation The Official Magazine ★★★★★ **Editors' Choice**

MLB 10: THE SHOW



↖ Play commentary is *MLB 10: The Show's* one glaring weakness.

The national pastime duly honored

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Sony San Diego

Whether it's competition from an improving 2K Sports *MLB* franchise or simply the joy of iterating on a fabulous foundation, Sony San Diego has *The Show* series down pat. For 2010 there's no resting on its laurels, no sitting on the beach for five months, working for a few, and figuring they'll come out ahead anyway. For any baseball fan, this year's *Show* game represents a complete package.

The Show's batter/pitcher faceoff has always excelled. Hitting is simple enough in theory, with the guess-pitch mechanic letting batters get in the head of the pitcher, and power hitting providing that swing-for-the-fences punch. On the other end, the three-click pitching system remains intact, though it can be frustrating. Even when we nailed the perfect delivery angle and location, we could still miss our intended target (by a significant bit). That could potentially lead to more walks, though the batter can also whiff on our mistakes. The theory is that these situations even out over the course of a game, but in reality it took us a full season to feel like we had a fair shake.

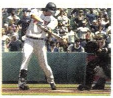
But playing through a full season, committing to 162-plus games, is easy for anyone with a love of the national pastime. Visually, *The Show* is unsurpassed. Details like the catcher's reaction to a home run or the shortstop avoiding a sliding base runner while throwing to first are animated with pixel perfection. We appreciated those touches even more as we moved a player toward the Bigs in the excellent Road to the Show mode. Learning the ropes in AA ball can be tough, and it required a real mental commitment when our starting pitcher was benched after a couple of no-fault no-decisions or our slugging first baseman hit a deep slump.

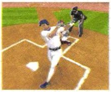
That commitment is made palatable by the quality oozing out of every feature, every visual detail, every pitch, and every hit in *The Show*—the best baseball game currently available. | Rob Smith

Rating ★★★★★

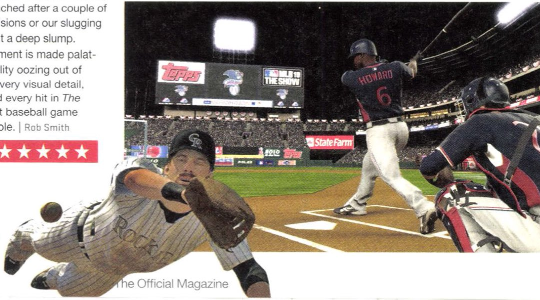
↘ World Series Showdown

They're both on shelves now, so which to go for: *The Show* or *MLB 2K10?*

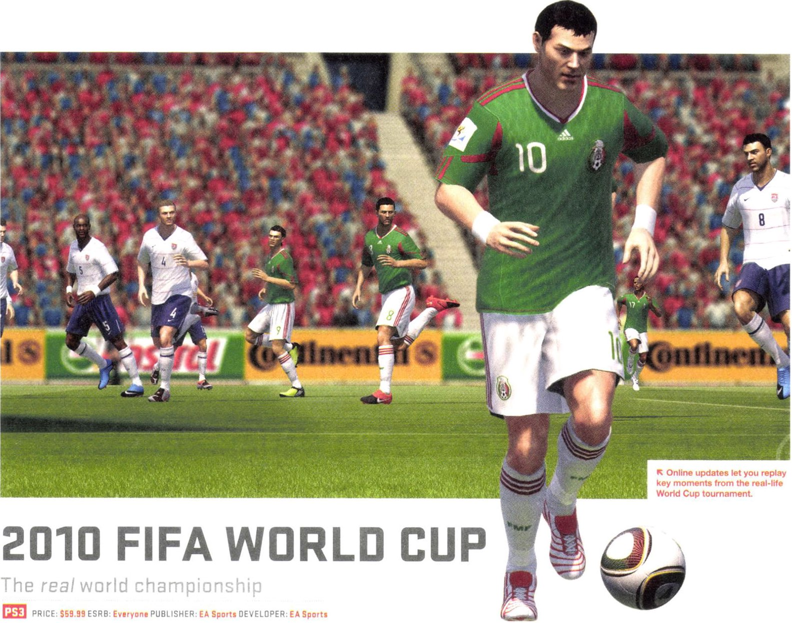




	The Show	MLB 2K10
Visuals	✓	
Commentary		✓
Pitcher/batter	✓	
Online	✓	
Interface		✓
Statistics	✓	✓
Features	✓	



→ Chicks may dig the long ball, but gamers prefer defensive gems—exquisitely rendered.



↖ Online updates let you replay key moments from the real-life World Cup tournament.

2010 FIFA WORLD CUP

The *real* world championship

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Sports

World Series. The Super Bowl. NBA Championships. All pretenders to the throne. Some 1.5 billion (that's not a misprint, that's a "B") will watch the final of the FIFA World Cup on July 11, 2010. Regardless of non-sporting events occurring around the world on that day, at least one of every four people *alive* will watch the game.

2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa fine-tunes EA's domineering presence on the soccer-gaming scene to capture the sights and even the horrible sounds of the world's greatest and most popular sporting event. Let's qualify the sound. The *vuvuzela* is a horn popular with South African fans. It produces, to everyone else, a hideous cacophony that will garner more column inches among the U.S. press than the tournament itself. Even trying the Captain Your Country mode or taking part in *FIFA's* extensive training modes, or deep in the tournament, it's there. It's grating to be sure, but is easily dismissed as the on-field action is the highest high of soccer skilldom.

The action, reflecting real-life soccer, can be both tedious and sensational. It can make its players look useless or inspired. Every movement reflects events seen in real games. Each sliding tackle illustrates just how random the bounce of the ball can be. *FIFA Soccer 10* already set the standard for simulation of the beautiful game and *World Cup* does a great job of capturing the atmosphere of the sport's ultimate event.

FIFA World Cup understands the passion of this international tournament and, more importantly, captures its play authentically and in dramatic fashion. The camera switches to coaches holding their heads after a bad miss, a newsfeed lets you know what's happening around the rest of the tournament (complete with real pictures pulled from qualifying matches), and player likenesses are detailed down to David Beckham's tattoo on his neck being visible.

Even if you've worn out the pitch in your copy of *FIFA 10,* there's no doubt this is the best virtual way to experience the action of the World Cup—before it even happens. | Rob Smith

Rating ★★★★½

↑ *Paradise's* two-week vacation includes 10 girls and 20 physics-modeled... You get the idea.

DEAD OR ALIVE: PARADISE

Titillating, but not really scintillating

PSP PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Tecmo Koei DEVELOPER: Project Venus

Didn't our mothers tell us that consuming too much eye-candy would make us go blind? Or something like that? Yeah, we weren't really listening either. But if we could recall the exact specifics of that sage, maternal advice, we're pretty certain it'd apply to *Dead or Alive: Paradise.*

Paradise isn't so much a game as a loose collection of minigames that serve as an excuse to ogle (barely) bikini-clad female characters from Tecmo's *Dead or Alive* series. The initial activities include beach volleyball, pool hopping, and three gambling games: blackjack, poker, and slot machines. Linger in *Paradise* long enough, and a buttonmashing footrace (called Beach Flags) is unlocked. None of these minigames are particularly compelling in themselves, but the volleyball is executed with just enough complexity and challenge to keep it fun during repeated replays.

But that's not the point here. The real goal is to earn enough funds to buy new, often-scantier beach attire to clad the ladies. Once the girls are bedecked in our personally preferred flavor of perversity, we can then view 30-second "Venus" video clips, in which our lady friends relax or frolic with each other. We also have the option to snap photos (inappropriately zooming in and adjusting camera angles) during the videos, all saved to the PSP's memory card for *(ahem)* later viewing.

Somewhere buried in this amalgamation of minigames and peepshow videos is a convoluted relationship management game with a bare skeleton of backstories. Shuffling the girls through 100-plus bikinis actually required us to become intimately familiar with their favorite colors, foods, and general interests. Buy an ill-considered item, choose the wrong wrapping color, and that expensive swimsuit gift we dropped major fundage for might end up on the closet floor. Start a spreadsheet to track the girl's whims—we did.

It all comes down to a lot of time and attention for some gratuitous eye-candy. Extreme dedication does unlock slightly more provocative stripper-pole videos, but there's no escalating gameplay arc or, dare we say, ultimate climax—and no actual nudity.

Mom might not approve, but if you're looking for a meaningless on-the-go fling, Tecmo's got the vacation for you. | Roger Burchill

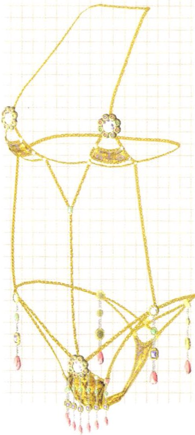
Rating ★★★☆☆

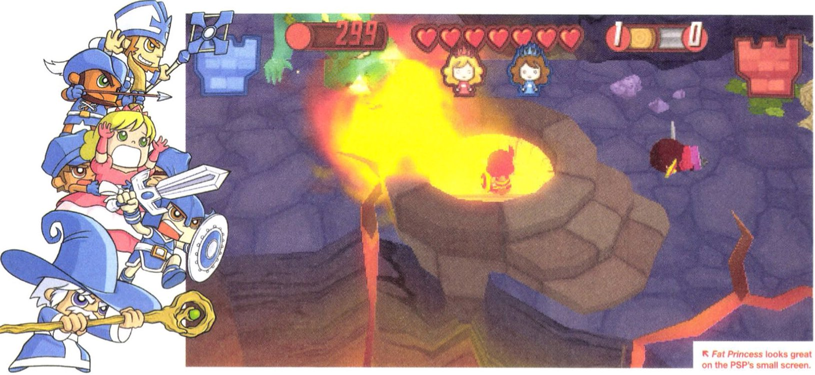
↙ Keep eyes on the ball... Keep eyes on the ball...

↗ Why isn't pool hopping an Olympic event?

↓Highly unsuitable

No, this isn't our latest craft project for *Floss and Beads Monthly* magazine. This is an actual swimsuit from *Dead or Alive: Paradise*, available for the small sum of a million Zack bucks. Think of it as an investment...for yourself.





↖ *Fat Princess* looks great on the PSP's small screen.

FAT PRINCESS: FISTFUL OF CAKE

Plumper in some areas, tighter in others

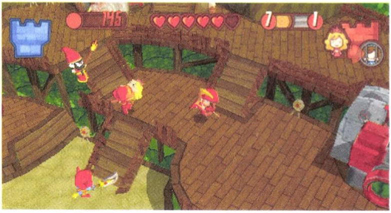
PSP PRICE: $19.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: SuperVillain Studios

When our competitive edge in a multiplayer battle can depend on how much cake we stuff into a captive princess, we know we're in for a unique experience. So it is with *Fat Princess,* which made its debut as a PS3 download last summer and now arrives largely intact on PSP. But while some of *Fistful of Cake's* alterations make for a sweeter confection than its console counterpart, others make this treat seem even more bite-sized than expected.

As with the original release, *Cake* is a simplified take on strategic team-based action games, putting us in command of a colorful little character who can swap classes (like warrior, ranger, or mage) on the fly by changing hats. The cuddly visuals and lighthearted tunes belie a raucous multiplayer experience—one that requires teamwork and strategy (such as the aforementioned cake feeding) to dominate the other team in combat.

Beyond the various play modes carried over from the PS3 version—including rescuing our princess, playing soccer, or simply slicing up our opponents en masse—*Cake* introduces some new multiplayer options, such as the solo soul-collecting in Grim Reaper and bomb-rolling in Demolition. The PSP version also adds six new maps to the game, but much of this seemed for naught once we realized that both the online and local multiplayer modes support just eight players, as opposed to 32 on PS3.

Much of what made *Fat Princess* so appealing in the first place was the large-scale chaos witnessed in 32-player online skirmishes, and while smaller team rosters can be filled out with AI-controlled teammates (for up to 16 total characters), working with bots just isn't the same. Sure, the extended single-player story mode adds a bit more punch to the process of playing alone, but it's still no substitute for the thrill of playing with a couple dozen other humans.



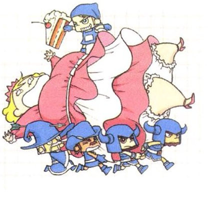
↑ A chubbier princess is much harder to carry back to her throne. Words to live by.

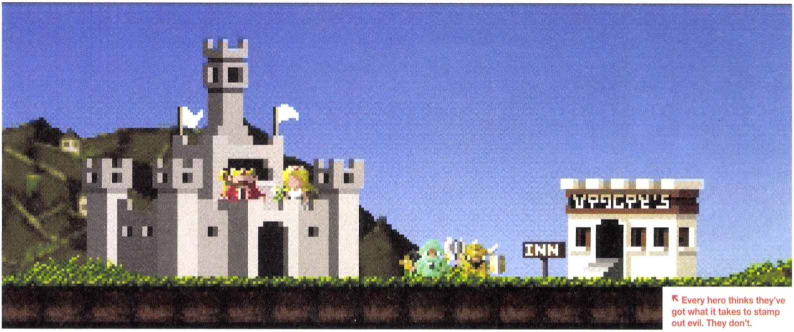
Cake retains enough of the *Fat Princess* charm and colorful gameplay to warrant a look, especially for portable multiplayer fiends. But those of us spoiled by the tastier PS3 entry may find this version more of a morsel than a true fistful. | Andrew Hayward

Rating ★★★½☆

↘The Cake Is a Lie

Fat Princess fudges its weight gain mechanic for strategic (and comedic) value, but how much cake would it actually take to pack on some pounds? Well, one pound of fat is equal to about 3,500 calories, so it takes 10 medium slices or more above your recommended caloric intake to merely get a pound closer to these super-sized ladies.





↖ Every hero thinks they've got what it takes to stamp out evil. They don't.

WHAT DID I DO TO DESERVE THIS, MY LORD!? 2

Evil can be so good

PSP PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: NIS America DEVELOPER: Acquire/SCE

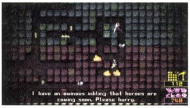
Being the God of Destruction is tough work. Every hero in the land has something to prove, and they just *love* charging into our lair right in the midst of remodeling. On the other hand, constantly chiseling away to improve our dank catacombs is so much more rewarding knowing our deadly renovations will scarf down troublesome do-gooders for breakfast. Even with a slightly tweaked moniker (because *Holy Invasion of Privacy, Badman! What Did I Do to Deserve This?* didn't quite roll off the tongue), the comparatively concise *What Did I Do to Deserve This, My Lord!? 2* is just as wacky and charming as the original. The gameplay, thankfully, is also much more forgiving.

As we use our pickaxe to create hallways in each dungeon, we're also spawning a medley of strange monsters—lizard men, slimes, demons, dragons, and new diabolical beasts—whenever we strike a nutrient block. These evil denizens will roam around eating other creatures, breed, and eventually die, replenishing nearby soil blocks with nutrients. Properly managing the dungeon's cyclical ecosystem yields far more powerful creature variations this time around. It's an important task, since there's little time to prepare between invasions from the human world. Certain conditions will also cause monsters to mutate into even freakier abominations, making them truly deadly defenders of the subterranean realm.

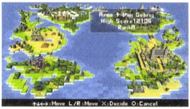
Instead of a single dungeon to endlessly plow through, *My Lord 2* is graciously divided into a handful of kingdoms to conquer. Each region has its own unique dungeon with several waves of heroes to overcome. This makes progress much less frustrating, since squashing each settlement saves the game, and it's possible to replay past dungeons.

My Lord 2 also charms with an adorable 8-bit aesthetic and an immediately endearing sense of quirky humor. With many new monsters, a vastly improved progress system, and the full original game (as a UMD-only unlockable), this is one worthy sequel—good enough that we might even be able to remember its entire name this time around. | Nathan Meunier

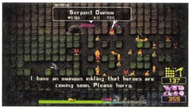
Rating ★★★★☆


I have an ominous inkling that heroes are coming soon. Please hurry.

↑ Mighty big evil can emerge from cute little things.



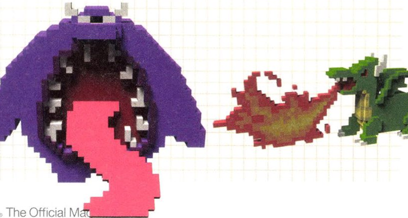
↑ There's a much bigger world full of goodness to crush.

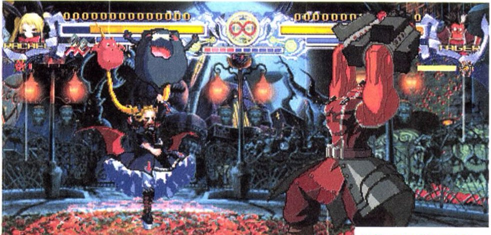

I have an ominous inkling that heroes are coming soon. Please hurry.

↑ Strange critters crop up if the delicate monster ecosystem gets off balance.

↘ Monstrous mutations

The fascinating new mutation system often results in bigger beasts, cannibal creatures, and other vicious varieties of wandering menaces. Our favorites include the stinger-equipped Parammando Moss (they appear when there's danger afoot), the chubby Obese Lizardman (he's found where food is scare), and the poison-tastic Toxonom Fly (they come out when predators are plentiful).





↖ Always good to stretch before an epic brawl.

BLAZBLUE: CALAMITY TRIGGER PORTABLE

Smaller, but no less deadly

PSP PRICE: **$29.99** ESRB: **Teen** PUBLISHER: **Aksys Games** DEVELOPER: **Arc System Works**

The standard for judging fighting games, years ago, was by how close they came to "arcade perfect." On the PSP, that focus shifts to "console perfect"—and while *BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger Portable* doesn't *quite* hit that mark, it comes awfully close. The visuals are noticeably jaggier than its PS3 counterpart, and network functionality has been pared down to ad-hoc play, but the smooth animation, diverse modes (including the elaborate, branching story mode), and fantastic over-the-top 2D fighting action are all intact.

Accessible enough for buttonmashers or those capable of just a few special moves and combos, *CTP*—like its PS3 big brother—also hides a wealth of more elaborate counters, cancels, and devastating super-attacks for the hardcore. It's fast, ridiculous, and (at its best) tough as nails, with 12 wildly diverse characters that range from the relatively traditional—like Ryu/Ken stand-ins Ragna and Jin—to outright weirdos like Arakune (a ghostly, blob-like combo machine), Rachel (a vampire girl who sets traps), and Carl (a magician boy who fights alongside a creepy, six-foot-tall marionette).

Of course, for the *truly* hardcore, not being able to use an arcade stick or play online will diminish the appeal considerably. But for everyone else, there are a couple of new modes to make up for the portable version's shortcomings: a "shop" filled with cool bonuses, and Legion mode, a strategy-lite minigame in which points on a map are contested in fights against multiple enemies. Great for honing skills on the road or simply on its own, *CTP* is an excellent port. | Mikel Reparaz

Rating ★★★★☆

↗ "Pull-ups. That the secret to gargantuan shoulders."

↑ Absolve or punish certain foes to earn upgrade points.

DANTE'S INFERNO

Slightly charred in translation

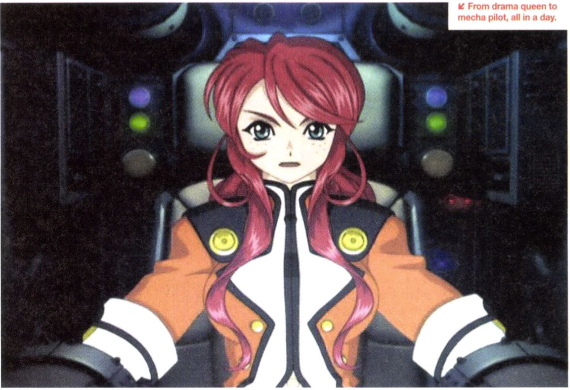
PSP PRICE: **$39.99** ESRB: **Mature** PUBLISHER: **Electronic Arts** DEVELOPER: **Visceral Games/A2M**

Rather than reimagining the game's *God of War*-like action for PSP, *Dante's Inferno* is instead a straight port of the PS3 original—well, sort of. On PSP, Dante loses the ability to equip helpful relics or unleash powered-up Redemption attacks, while some previously interactive sequences have been curiously replaced by cutscenes. The result is a shorter, simpler action game that suffers from the sort of minor control and camera issues we've come to expect from a console port, but it still manages to adequately deliver the extreme violence and imagery that define the *Inferno* experience. We'd definitely pick the PS3 version over this, but when it comes to kicking afterlife ass on the go, *Dante's Inferno* is a reasonably solid option. | Andrew Hayward

Rating ★★★☆☆

↓ Glowing cross projectiles help keep enemies at bay.

↑ Big fan of nudity in games? Here you go. Creep.



↙ From drama queen to mecha pilot, all in a day.

Defense
SP
ormal

SAKURA WARS: SO LONG, MY LOVE

Samurai cowgirls. Need we say more?

PS2 PRICE: $29.99/$39.99 (Premium) ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: NIS America DEVELOPER: Idea Factory

A certain set of die-hard anime fans may view *Sakura Wars* as the apex of civilization. It's part social-interaction simulation, part strategy-RPG, and all saucer-eyed cartoon cuties, all the time.

Or maybe not *all* the time. Some of the time is reserved for steam-powered giant robots. But the idea remains: This is the second or third sphere of Otaku Heaven.

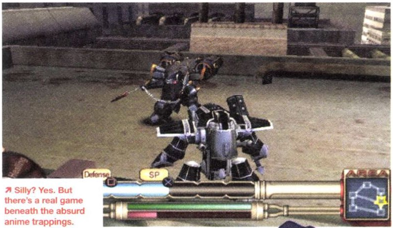
Sakura Wars: So Long, My Love is not a bad game, either, but it does require a certain tolerance for the absurd. The action takes place in a colorful alternate version of New York in the roaring '20s, and almost everything about the characters and the adventure they trip through is relentlessly silly. Our heroines—from a Texas-born wannabe samurai to a roller-skating waitress—operate using an off-Broadway theater for cover. When they go into action against the forces of evil, the building transforms into a massive neon crossbow that catapults their fighting mecha over the Big Apple skyline.

The combat uses a conventional turn-based system presented in a snazzy cinematic style, but our performance partly depends on how well we play other aspects of the game. It's like *Persona 4,* if not so complex. When we're not fighting, we're getting to know the rest of our robot-pilot squad (in other words, getting our anime mack on). Smart decisions in the social sequences pay dividends in combat, because the better our allies like us, the harder they fight.

Those seeking a serious strategy game, however, should look elsewhere. At least half of *So Long, My Love* is a digital-comic adventure with long stretches of reading and clicking between the big fights—and, once again, the world and the narrative are not necessarily for everyone. The game occurs in a Japanese development team's conception of what historical America might have been like (which is a foolproof recipe for the bizarre), and the dialogue is hilariously overwrought at the best of times.

Yes, fans of Japanese cartoons will feel right at home here. | David F. Smith

Rating ★★★⯪☆



↗ Silly? Yes. But there's a real game beneath the absurd anime trappings.

→ Alternate History

Way back in 2002, the boss of Sega's Overworks development group billed this game as the first entry in the series that would come to America. (In Japan, it was *Sakura Wars* number five, after two titles saw release on the Sega Saturn and two more on the Dreamcast.) For some reason, though, Sega of America passed on it. Maybe it didn't think we were ready for samurai cowgirls.

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developed by Media Molecule.

PlayStation.
The Official Magazine

↙ For a game with "dragon" in the title, these plus-sized lizards have surprisingly little to do with the story.

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS – AWAKENING

An epic epilogue

PS3 PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: BioWare

As if 500 hours in Ferelden wasn't enough, along comes *Awakening* to spur us back into *Dragon Age's* world. Not that we're complaining. This expansion pack to the astoundingly addictive RPG not only raises the level-cap to 35, but also offers an additional 20 hours of questing for us to get lost in.

Building off the events of *Origins, Awakening* once again lays the heavy mantle of Grey Warden onto our weary shoulders. The action is suitably epic right from the start, pitting us against a host of new Darkspawn forces, including massive ogres and a mysterious, sentient Darkspawn.

Despite the challenging new foes, this isn't a reworking of the original game. *Awakening* is strictly more of what we already love, with a few twists to keep things lively. We have, for example, the option to start with a completely new (and thoroughly entertaining) character: either a respected hero or a suspicious foreigner. But even when we imported one of our *Origins* characters—which we're assuming most players will do—we didn't see the same old faces. Gone are the original companions—with the exception of Oghren and some minor cameos. And abandon all hope of new trysts. But perhaps love is best avoided anyway, considering all the troubled situations our new cohorts bring with them. It's a perfect excuse to try out our new abilities, including runecrafting and the much ballyhooed battle mage specialization. Also welcome: the ability to re-spec our character (albeit for the price of a tome purchased from a merchant).

As for the story itself, the dramatic twists and the nuanced moral decision-making are still intact. That said, *Awakening* falters in its initial few hours. Yes, our local province is once again at risk, but gone is *Origins'* foreboding sense of global catastrophe, along with that feeling of righteousness at bringing our betrayer to justice. It isn't until much later that the richness of the situation begins to emerge, as we discover more about the sentient Darkspawn and get a sense of why this expansion is important to the overall *DAO* story. Still, the early portion never devolves into tedium—it's just not as awesome as we hoped for.

An epic and engaging experience, *Awakening* isn't quite the tour de force we were craving from the creators of *Origins,* but we're more than happy with this "further adventures of" epilogue. | Nathan Wilson

Rating ★★★★☆

↖ Just like in the original game, replay value is high.

↖ Stop dragon our heart around. Hah!

HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON

Dragon Age...appropriate

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Etranges Libellules

For the great unwashed and, possibly, unenlightened among us, there are but two sad and great truths that apply to dragons. The first, of course, reminds us all that "Puff the Magic Dragon," as popularized by folk singers Peter, Paul, and Mary, is not commentary on a boy's march toward adulthood but rather a thinly veiled drug anthem. The second, and perhaps more disheartening: *These dragons will not train themselves.*

As young Vikings Astrid or Hiccup, players must train dragons. This involves fetching a lot of weeds, vegetables, and bugs; tackling of sheep, boars, and chickens; and tipping of stone monoliths. Dragons must be fed, healed, given time to sleep, duly bribed with treasure and, finally, pitted against one another. It's a lot like a job, except with more scorched earth and fewer coworkers hawking their kids' Girl Scout cookies.

As children's fare, *How to Train Your Dragon* more than suffices. Its world is bright, cheery, and filled with the charming oafs plucked straight from the animated film. It offers goofy and customizable dragons like the fat-bodied Gronckle and the more imposing Hideous Zippleback. Its action- and memory-based minigame challenges are tuned to a child's sensibilities; *Dragon* never dumbs things down with mindless tasks nor attempts to overstep its bounds by ramping up the difficulty.

Players can build a four-dragon stable, and RPG elements allow for the beasts to become more powerful and learn new moves. None of it is brilliant, but these dragons, properly trained, can take flight. | Greg Orlando

Rating ★★★☆☆

← ProTip: Dragons like fighting and eating, and not going to the opera unless the prima donna is really fat.

↑ In developer's jail, you get to lift C++ manuals.

PRISON BREAK: THE CONSPIRACY

Jail broke

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Deep Silver DEVELOPER: ZootFly

Long after the TV series was summarily executed, *Prison Break: The Conspiracy* has us sharing a cell with secret agent Tom Paxton for a five-hour side story paralleling the show's first season.

Ninety percent of the game's hard time is sneaking around the prison fulfilling monotonous objectives. The basic sneak mechanics are clumsy; the minimap shows the surrounding area and which way the guards are facing, but doesn't indicate their field of vision. Each time Paxton's spotted, the game halts and resets to the last checkpoint.

The other 10 percent centers on fighting and using poorly implemented quick-time events to get Paxton out of tight spots. The game only allows for a split second to stop hammering a button before demanding another button be pressed, necessitating repeated replays.

Though not technically broken, the ill-conceived *Prison Break* should be considered cruel and unusual punishment. | David Murphy

Rating ★⯨☆☆☆

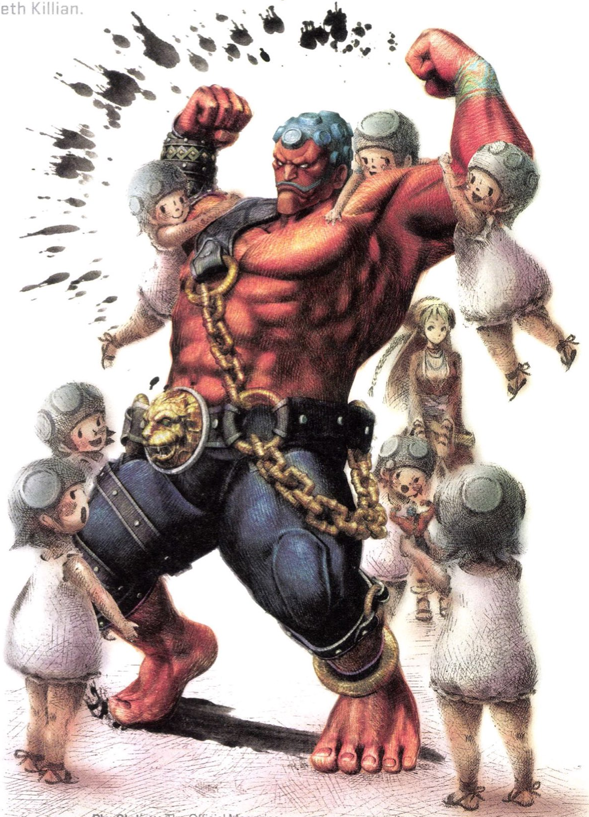
↑ With *Prison Break*, it's best to lie back and think of spring.

Ten Count

Unlock the immeasurable potential of all 10 new *Super Street Fighter IV* characters with these surefire tips and techniques straight from Capcom Special Advisor (and all-around *Street Fighter* guru) Seth Killian.

Hakan

To put it simply: stay oily or get owned. Hakan has some dangerous moves, but they become twice as deadly after he uses his Oil Shower to get slippery. When Hakan oils up, he not only does more damage, his Oil Rocket grab gets massively extended range, and most of his normal moves (and even his Focus Attack) can be used to slide forward, giving him almost Dhalsim-like range on some attacks with Zangief-like damage. Hakan doesn't have strong options against people jumping at him, so try out his Ultra II combo (Oil Combination Hold), which grabs everything out of the air with big damage and hilarious results. Since he's a grappling character that relies on grabs to do damage, opponents will try to keep their distance, but that affords you an easy opportunity to oil up from across the screen. Try the EX Oil Shower—fireballs will pass straight through you—while getting greasy, then use Hakan's slide to quickly close distance and throw foes around like rag dolls.



Juri

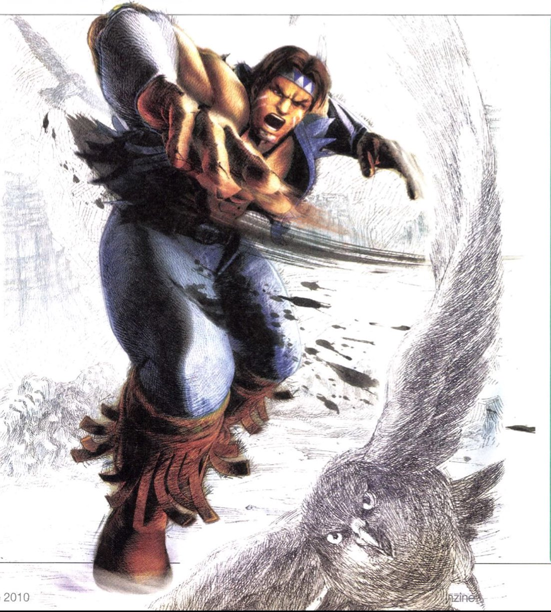
She might seem like an in-your-face pixie, but Juri actually has some of the best long-distance moves in the game. Her core gameplay relies on using fireballs (remember, you can wait to release fireballs by holding down the kick button) to get an opponent to react, then punishing them for everything they try. If they jump, try to meet them in the air with a jumping medium punch. If it hits, you can juggle them with an EX Pinwheel Kick for good damage, or even her Ultra II (Kaisen Dankairaku). Use her Dive kick to punish opponents from the air, but don't abuse it—it's not safe if they block it. If you see an opportunity, go for EX Dive and juggle them with an Ultra after they bounce off the wall. Use the EX Pinwheel to escape pressure situations, but with low stamina and spotty defensive options, Juri functions best when she's on the offensive and shutting down opponents before they can even get into position.

Dudley

An all-around monster, Dudley's got a great uppercut, combos, damage, and versatile, high-damage Ultra combos. The one place he isn't very strong is from long distance, so fight your way to mid-close range (a range just beyond the reach of Ryu's crouching hard kick sweep). Use his Ducking rush to close the advance and sidestep fireballs, and once you're up close, confuse an opponent by switching among chain combos, the backswing blow, and his overhead (towards+hard kick)—if you're quick, you can even follow up the overhead with a Super for massive damage. Dudley's cross-counter wasn't too great in *SF3*, but in *SSFIV* it grabs virtually everything for big damage, so don't forget this move. If you land one of his quick crouching jab punches, combo that into a standing hard kick and cancel into EX Machinegun Blow—it'll back your opponent into the corner and send them flying, giving you plenty of time to finish them off with a Corkscrew Cross Ultra combo.

Ibuki

The ninja girl can annoy you with her Kunai knives thrown from the air, but you won't win a match just by throwing those and running away. If you want to win with Ibuki, get ready to get in your opponent's face and mix it up. The key to winning up close is her chain combos—she's got a bunch of great combinations that can easily connect into her Whirlwind kick or Lightning strike, and if your rival's blocking, combo into her Command dash to run to the other side and keep the pressure on. Ibuki can also cancel the recovery on most of her normal moves with a jump, which not only lets her poke very safely, but can also be used to combo into her Super or even an Ultra combo if you're fast. Use her EX Kubiori Neck Breaker to slide instantly across the screen and punish long range when you're on the ground. She also has a fairly effective uppercut, but can be vulnerable to getting crossed up—since she can't take a punch, it's best to stay on the attack.



T. Hawk

As a grappler, Hawk wants to be up close to do big damage, but he's actually pretty versatile from a few different ranges. From cross-screen, look for chances to land the Condor dive from the air. It's not safe on block, but even if it doesn't hit, it closes the distance quickly and gets you in their face, and Hawk can take more damage than anyone in the game, so don't be afraid to eat a few fireballs while you're marching forward. Use standing hard kick and crouching medium punch to poke at midrange, along with his new Condor Spire move. It floats over most sweeps and leaves you in perfect position to land a piledriver if the opponent decides to block. If you manage to hit the opponent with the Spire while they're trying to jump away, tack on an EX Uppercut into EX dive for extra damage and good position (but outside of combos, don't rely too heavily on his uppercut—it's got deceptively short range). When you're up close, go for the jab Piledriver (unless you're right on the verge of KOing the opponent). It does a little less damage but has the best range, and even better, leaves you standing right next to the opponent as they stand up—in perfect position to grab them again.

Dee Jay

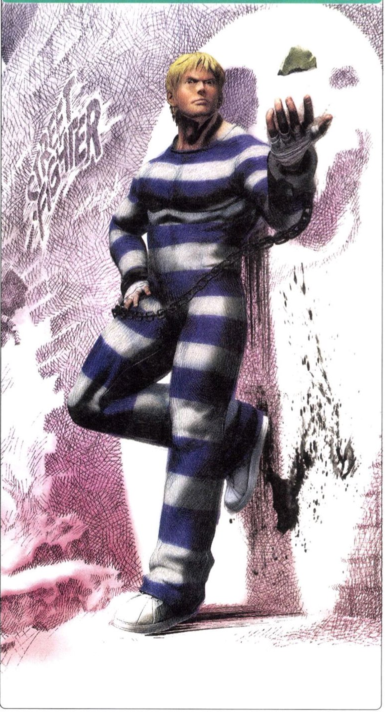
Dee Jay works best as a "tank" character, so hunker back into a defensive crouch and get ready to throw some Air Slashers (formerly known as the Max Out fireball). Dee Jay can be effective from anywhere but isn't overwhelming anywhere, so choose your shots carefully. From cross-screen, smother your opponents with Air Slashers, and look to punish them as they try to dodge your barrage. From mid-screen, mix in the Air Slashers with a few careful pokes and the Sobat kick. His light kick Sobat has great recovery and a bit of invulnerability on start-up, and the EX Sobat is extremely fast from mid-range with a healthy window of invulnerability, so you'll have plenty of chances to land it. Dee Jay can be uncomfortable up close, so go for crouching medium kick to knock the opponent down and reset your offense with his powerful jumping forward kick, which crosses up easily and leads to great combo opportunities. His flashkicks are decent anti-air, but the biggest pitfall for Dee Jay players is to rely too much on his hard kick slide. It's got some good uses, but can be easily punished when in too close, so use it carefully.

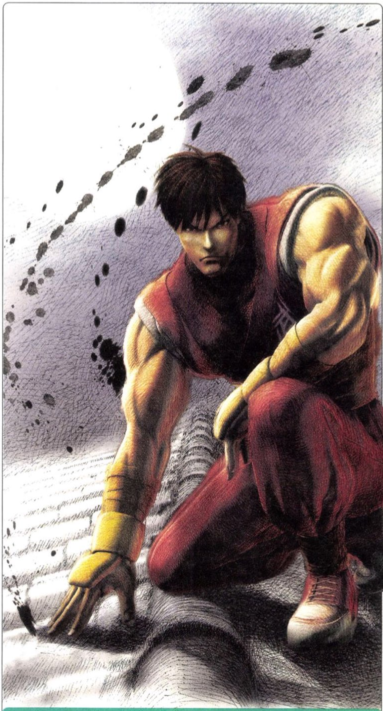
Makoto

Makoto's overall game revolves around dashing in and out with a mix of regular attacks, the Hayate rushing punch, and of course the Karakusa choke grab. You can do solid damage without ever actually grabbing anyone, but it's the threat of the grab that makes Makoto so terrifying, because she has a brief window to do a combo after a successful choke. Makoto has painfully slow walking speed, but one of the fastest dashes in the game. This means she can't be as precise with her spacing, but she can move in and out in the blink of an eye. Although the EX Karakusa is great (EX lets you take a hit while you're grabbing someone), try to save your Super meter to do her Super Combo, which increases your overall damage for a nice chunk of time, and can also be used to cancel Hayate into Super into Ultra I (Seichusan Godanzuki)! Makoto has trouble on defense and from across the screen. Use her Otoshi kicks as soon as you jump to approach from the air, but if you're really struggling to close in on your opponent consider using her Ultra II (Abare) to fly off the wall and punish cross-screen fireballs. Don't rely on the upward Fukiage punch as anti-air—it's very finicky and can get you killed if you use it like you would a Shoryuken. Her Oroshi punch can be a useful overhead mixup, and the EX version actually has good invulnerability, making it one of her best (if most unlikely) anti-air attacks.

Cody

A really fun and well-rounded character with great combos and useful Ultras, Cody can put up a fight from almost anywhere but is best from midrange. The tornado-esque Criminal Upper can be used to pressure and do chip damage on offense, while also creating a defensive wall to cancel fireballs and catch someone trying to jump. His jumping medium kick has great cross-up abilities, so use that after a knockdown to create pressure, and be creative with his crouching punches that all combo together in different ways and can connect into his rushing kicks. From mid- or full-screen, annoy your opponent by throwing his fireball-like rocks. It looks funny, but they're actually pretty quick and can annoy people into letting you get closer. Use his standing medium punch and his hard kick Ruffian Kick for anti-air. His crouching medium kick slide can pass under projectiles, but Cody's biggest surprise is his new Zonk Knuckle—hold down any punch for two seconds and release to do a quick dodge into a cross punch. It's a great quick attack, and the dodge can pass through fireballs or other attacks.



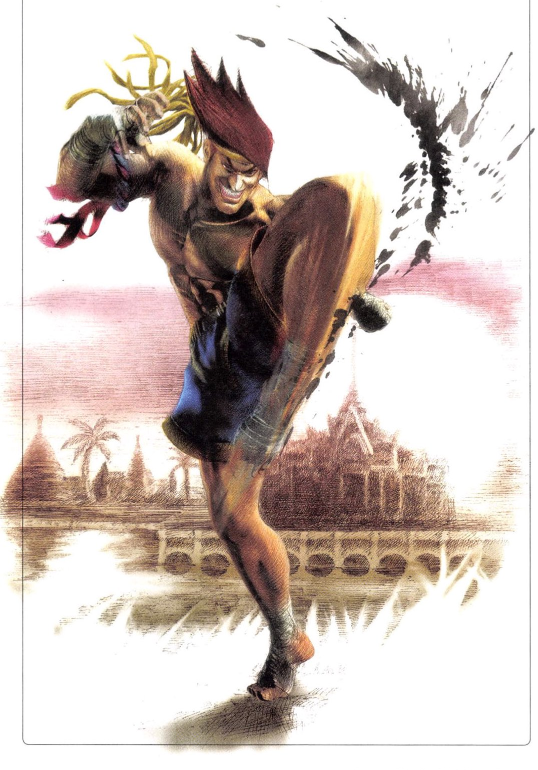


Guy

Guy's gameplan revolves around a fast-paced mixup starting with his Bushin run, from which he can go into a slide, an overhead, or a quick stop into regular attacks or even a throw. His flying flip Izuna drop is also great—you can grab virtually anything out of the air or on the ground with this, or cancel the arc into an elbow that drops straight down. All of his hurricane kicks are decent anti-air moves, and the EX version can even blow through your opponent's strongest attacks, so use it when you're under pressure and need to turn the tables. The Houzanto shoulder rams must be used carefully, but the EX version is a lightning quick way to counter a mid-screen fireball and it launches opponents so you can continue your combo afterwards if you're quick. His Bushin chain combo can be tricky to set up, but does great damage and can be combo'd into his Ultra I (Bushin Goraisenpujin). The key to victory with Guy is to keep a good balance between a confusing series of rushdown attacks and carefully timed counterattacks executed just when your opponent thinks he's finally found his opening.

Adon

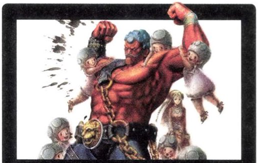
As one of the game's more straightforward fighters, Adon's core gameplan is to lock down foes with his speed and chain ground moves into his Jaguar Kick. All versions of the Jaguar Kick have slightly different properties, and the EX version must be blocked high, so mix them up to prevent your opponent from mounting a counterattack. Adon's overhead punch has great range and decent damage, so use his fast dash to mix that in with throws and hard kick sweeps while setting up your Jaguar Kicks. Be careful not to overuse his off-the-wall Jaguar Tooth attack as you can be punished when it's blocked or countered—though if you see a spot to land the EX version, follow that up with his Ultra II (Jaguar Avalanche). If your opponent evades your Jaguar Kick traps, go for light kick Jaguar Tooths to build meter and keep them guessing while remaining fairly safe. The Rising Jaguar can be used as anti-air or to punish pokes, and the light punch version recovers fairly fast even on block, so feel free to throw a few out there in an effort to surprise opponents and score some big damage by Focus-canceling it into Ultra II.



Unused character ideas?

"I don't want to tell you too much because then we won't be able to make *[Street Fighter]* 5 or 6 [laughs], but I'll tell you one kind-of funny one: We were actually thinking of doing a snake charmer at one point who was possibly going to be a friend of, or somehow related to Dhalsim. You'd do a fireball command and he'd whip out his flute and make a snake come out and hurt the opponent. We actually thought about that for a good bit!"

—Producer Yoshinori Ono

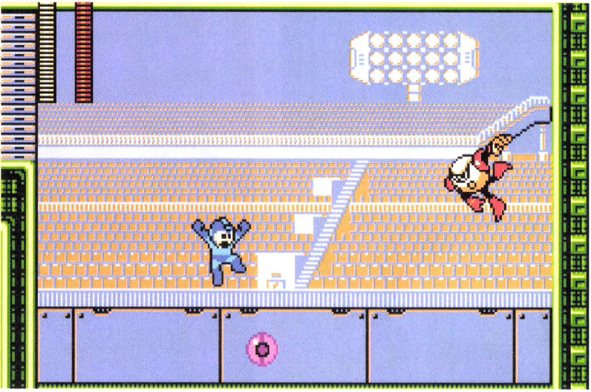


On Hakan's origins

"Basically, we feel that *Street Fighter* is kind of different from other fighting game series in that it's not all about the pretty boys. It's not just about these slim, handsome characters fighting each other. There's a lot of wackiness in *Street Fighter;* there always has been. So basically this time we wanted something a bit out of the ordinary, something kind of unique that would be more on the humorous side of things. Then one of our designers actually showed us a YouTube video of Turkish oil wrestling. It's kind of unusual; it's something that not everyone's familiar with; so I figured that would fit nicely."

—Producer Yoshinori Ono

PlayStation Network Games



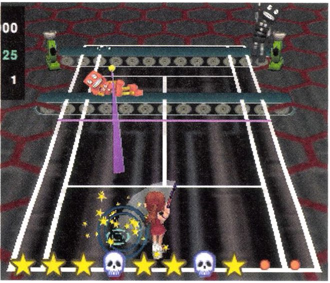
Mega Man 10

PS3 PRICE: $9.99 ESRB: Everyone
PUBLISHER: Capcom DEVELOPER: Ini Creates

+ Mega Man's earlier days were arguably his best, and it's great to see recent entries are continuing to mine the series' classic 8-bit roots instead of slapping a shoddy coat of blue and turquoise paint on a gangly next-gen abomination. *Mega Man 10* is packed with all of the blistering challenge and retro flair fans crave. It feels like a real blast from the past, yet this entirely new robotic adventure has enough modern amenities to keep us from hurling our controllers against the wall.

A dubious outbreak of the flu-like Roboenza sends many of the city's robots on a rampage, mustering up a new batch of wacky robot masters for Mega Man to face off against. The baseball-themed Strike Man, the wooly Sheep Man, and the sharply dressed Blade Man are among our favorite new adversaries. And the age-old Mega Man tradition of tackling stages in a particular order to exploit boss weaknesses is back in good form.

Mega Man 10's no-nonsense platforming gameplay is as tight and unforgiving as ever. A new Easy mode cuts down on the volume of enemies and covers up some of the spiked pits to make things less frustrating for newcomers. Additional achievement challenges are also a nice touch, as is the option to play as Proto Man from the get-go. | Nathan Meunier



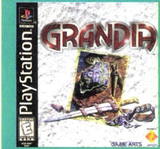
Super Pocket Tennis

PSP PRICE: $4.99 ESRB: Everyone
PUBLISHER: D3Publisher DEVELOPER: HuneX

+ Carrying a tennis racket around in our pants isn't completely out of the question, but *Super Pocket Tennis* does offer a more comfortable alternative for a quick on-the-go tennis fix. Going solo against bobble-headed computer opponents in tournaments delivers a nicely scalable challenge, and a clever ball indicator system makes it easy to tell where shots are headed. The core traditional modes are enjoyable on their own, but the oddball mini-games that had us lobbing shots at aliens, blowing up mines, and smashing brick walls were an unexpected delight. | NM

PSone Fun

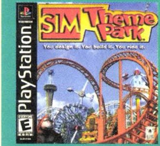
Can't miss classics—now available on PSN



Grandia

PS3/PSP | PRICE: $9.99 | ESRB: Everyone

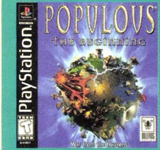
The RPG that gave the *Final Fantasy* series a run for its money: Its strong story and lengthy adventures still hold up well.



Sim Theme Park

PS3/PSP | PRICE: $5.99 | ESRB: Everyone

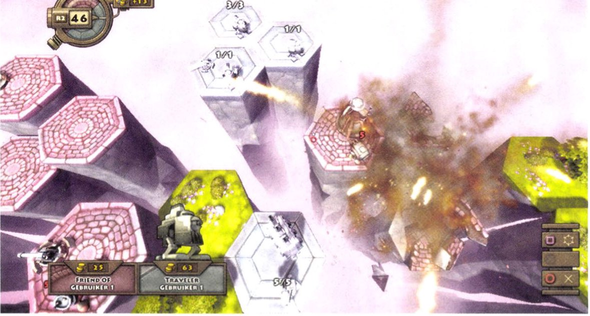
If going to the closest theme park isn't an option, building and running a virtual one is the next best thing for budding carnival heads.



Populous: The Beginning

PS3/PSP | PRICE: $5.99 | ESRB: Teen

Being a god is heady stuff. Building and crushing empires in this magical world provides a satisfying ego boost.



Greed Corp

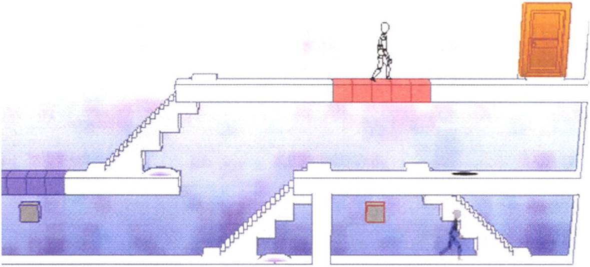
PS3 PRICE: $9.99 ESRB: Everyone
PUBLISHER: W!Games DEVELOPER: W!Games

+ The devious Catch-22 insidiously woven into the fabric of *Greed Corp's* gameplay makes it one of the most interesting and unusual turn-based strategy games we've played. As the first of multiple games to be set within the fictional Mistbound universe, the game plunks us down in the midst of a war between industrialized nations. However, the conflict is a precarious one, since it's being played out on a world that's rapidly crumbling away in large chunks.

Engaging in turn-based combat against up to three enemy factions on an island-like grid map is a lot like Russian roulette for all of the combatants involved. Devastating harvesters mine the resources required to build troops and other important installations, but their use causes all of the hexagonal territories they touch to sink a bit each round. Ultimately the hexes crumble into nothingness, obliterating anything remaining on them in the process.

The erosive nature of resource gathering makes engagements intense "last one standing" affairs, since the entire battlefield typically whittles away to a few single pegs of land by the end of each game. It's an innovative approach that opens up a whole new world of twisted, kamikaze-style strategies to set into motion.

Greed Corp is at its best when played against human opponents, but the lengthy solo campaign is also satisfyingly challenging. | NM



Echoshift

PSP PRICE: $14.99 ESRB: Everyone
PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Artoon

+ Some days we wish we could clone ourselves to tackle all of the tasks that need to be done. That's essentially the entire premise for *Echoshift* (the spiritual successor to brain-bending puzzler *Echochrome).*

Every stage is a 2D platforming puzzle that requires players to navigate a stick-figure character to the level-ending door within a tight timeframe. It's so tight, in fact, that it's impossible to complete the multi-step process of hitting switches, avoiding enemies, and unraveling the complex sequence of obstacles to unlock the way without the aid of phantom clones. Each run-through is recorded, and the shadowy ghost data from previous attempts plays out in real-time in subsequent runs. With nine lives to work with, later stages become a complex balancing act.

We initially found teaming up with ourselves a bizarre concept, but the crazier the game gets, the more fun it becomes. Somehow it all comes together and just works. There are three separate modes for each of the 56 main unlockable stages (additional levels can be downloaded).

Echoshift packs a ton of puzzles in a small package. Its high replay value and captivating quirkiness make it a good pick for puzzle fans. | NM

Play On

Must-have add-ons from the PlayStation Store

Topatoi
Pillar of the Skies

PRICE: $7.99 | **ESRB:** Everyone

This second episode in the *Topatoi* series features darker, more mechanized environments, a lengthier story, and some slick new light-based mechanics.

Borderlands
The Secret Armory of General Knoxx

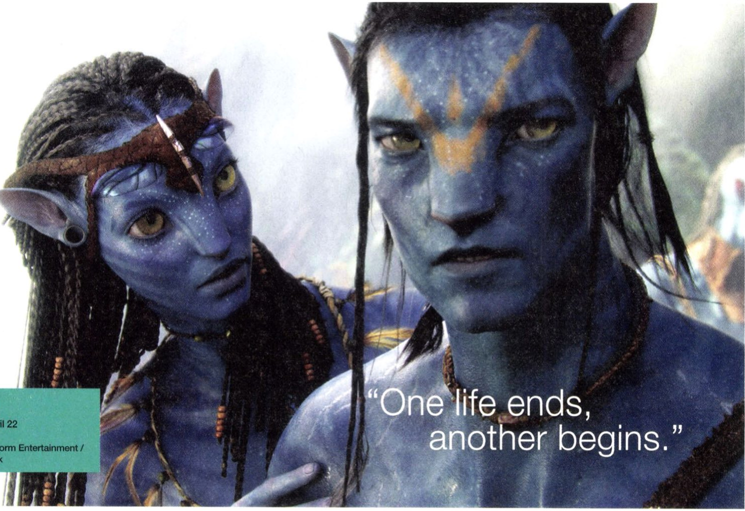
PRICE: $9.99 | **ESRB:** Mature

With tons of new weapons, class mods, big vehicles, and enemies, Knoxx delivers a big bang for the buck. The roomier level cap (61) also rocks.

Resident Evil 5
Untold Stories Bundle

PRICE: $12.49 | **ESRB:** Mature

Expand the *Resident Evil 5* story with two all-new episodes of untold horrors: "Lost in Nightmares" and "Desperate Escape."



"One life ends, another begins."

AVATAR

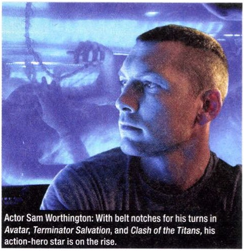
AVAILABLE: April 22
GENRE: Sci-Fi
STUDIO: Lightstorm Entertainment / 20th Century Fox

PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

What we're downloading to our PS3 this month

James Cameron is a genius. First, there was the ultimate date movie *Titanic*, which insidiously doomed every male on the planet to celibacy if he failed to pop for his girl's 14 viewings—miserably accompanying her at least once. Now comes *Avatar*, a pro-environment anti-war film filled with lust-worthy military-geek-tech and explosions galore. We're not sure what that dichotomy says about us, but touring the movie's Electric Light Parade-splattered alien Disneyworld cloaked in a feel-good message *is* strangely comforting. Oh, who are we kidding? Here, Jimbo, take our cash and just let us watch the movie again... Please?

Why We're Watching



Actor Sam Worthington: With belt notches for his turns in *Avatar, Terminator Salvation,* and *Clash of the Titans,* his action-hero star is on the rise.

We just can't get enough of that "Colors of the Wind" song, no matter how many times we see the movie. Oh, wait...

Call us fashion snobs, but we don't care how awesome the 3D version is—there's no way we're wearing these things in public.

We needs our war porn. Nothing beats traveling light-years to a peaceful alien planet just to blow stuff up.

Blame it on the James T. Kirk strand in our DNA, but be they green or blue, alien chicks are uber-hot.

Top VDS Downloads

TOP 5 MOVIES TO OWN:

- *Sherlock Holmes*
- *Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel*
- *God of War: Unearthing the Legend Ninja Assassin*
- *The Men Who Stare at Goats*

TOP 5 TV SHOWS:

- *Family Guy: Season 8*
- *24: Season 8*
- *South Park Uncensored: Season 14*
- *Chuck: Season 3*
- *Lost: Season 6*

↑ "Eliminate all other factors, and the one which remains must be the truth: My watch has stopped."

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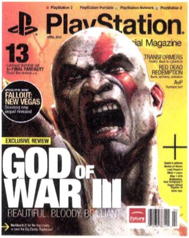
Letters



▲ This month's conversation starter

> "The Nanosuit 2.0 would be impossible to wear, and *Crysis 2* suffers as a result." ↘

Send your comments to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com. Just keep it carb-free. We're trying to lose some weight. And we're grumpy about it.

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I am a force of nature!
I gave Death himself a beatdown!

OH-GODS OF WAR

I really need your help. One of my best friends and I have gotten into this serious debate about who would win in a battle between Kratos and Dante. He picked Dante, and of course I said Kratos. I'm really interested in your take on this epic battle. I know Dante is a cool, sword-bearing half-demon, but he's out of his league against the relentless, brutal, bloodthirsty Spartan-turned-god named Kratos. Please publish this so I can throw this in his face (assuming you side with me). | *Darren, via email*

Well, we're naturally inclined to pick Kratos since the *God of War* games are clearly better than *Dante's Inferno*, but this situation just isn't that simple. After all, Dante *literally* fights, kills, and loots Death himself at the beginning of the game. Kratos may be imbued with the power of the gods, but can he really compete with the man who murdered Death? Regardless, in our minds, they'd make a better team than mortal foes. They can rule over religious mythology together!

BY "UNLIMITED" IT IS MEANT "LIMITED"

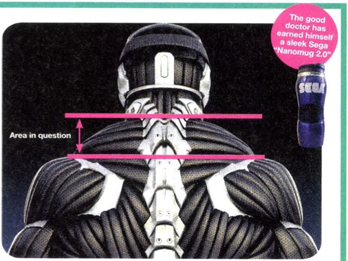
So two years ago, I bought *Test Drive Unlimited*. Then a few days ago, I was reading this article about online games, and I saw a list of games that had their online servers shutdown. *TDU* was one of them. What I want to know is: Why did the *TDU* developers shut it down? It was a five-star game. I hope you guys have an answer.
Sammy, via email

Look at it this way, Sammy: If you had to *read* about the servers being shut down rather than realizing it

LETTER OF THE MONTH

SPINAL CRAP

I appreciate the incredible gameplay Crytek has achieved with *Crysis 2*, but its "Nanosuit 2.0" could never be worn by a human. In the attached scan taken from PTOM's March 2010 issue, I have indicated a horizontal line passing across both shoulders and a parallel horizontal line at the base of the skull. An imaginary vertical line linking the two would pass directly down the spine. In humans, this ratio of neck length to shoulder width does not exceed 1:6. The ratio in the Nanosuit 2.0 is 1:4. I am shocked Red Dot Online did not consult with an anatomist prior to issuing an award for Crytek's suit design. The Nanosuit 2.0 would be impossible to wear, and *Crysis 2* suffers as a result of this fundamental design flaw. | *Dr. James Quesenberry, Professor of Anatomy, University of Teutonia School of Medicine*


Area in question
The good doctor has earned himself a sleek Sega "Nanomug 2.0"
SEGA

Wow, that's both very observant and very insightful of you, Doctor Nerdstrom, but you slipped up by sending us a note when we weren't hopped up on Pixie Stix and Faygo. (Also, the "University of Teutonia" is more fake than Piltdown Man.) Still, we totally appreciate the effort it must have taken to manufacture such a believable (and humorous) diagnosis, so we're happy to proclaim your erudite submission this issue's Letter of the Month.

when you actually tried playing *TDU*, what makes you think other people are still playing it? Maintaining online servers costs money, so when interest in the game wanes, the developers make the difficult, but sensible, decision to shut down and move on. But *Test Drive 2* is in the works so you may be hitting the online road again sooner than you thought.

CHUBBY CHASER

There are many awesome games out there, but how many of them star an overweight hero? What if Kratos were a 400-pound killer? I really think developers need to look into this concept because we need fat heroes too! Also, Jack Black's role in *Brutal Legend* doesn't count. He was kind of muscular in that game. Where's the love for the fat people? (I'm not fat; I just support their lifestyle.)
George Malfavon, Dinuba, CA

Without delving too deeply into heavy issues like our culture's infatuation with appearance and our unrealistic standards of beauty, we'll just say that most people probably prefer to play as fit, muscular Adonises because these traits—in addition to being viewed as attractive and desirable—are difficult to obtain in real life. Not many people aspire to be fat. But hey, at least the overweight crowd will always have E. Honda and Rufus from *Street Fighter*.

THE PARENT TRAP

Should I play *Modern Warfare*, *Borderlands*, and *Resident Evil 5* with my eight-year-old son? We really have some fun playing splitscreen together, and I'm not really worried about the blood and gore (I constantly remind him the facts about guns and war and how there is no respawn in real life and so on). I am more concerned about the swearing. He knows swear words are bad and he has been really good about not using them, but I cringe when I hear one of the bad ones in a game. They really should have an option to bleep out swears. Otherwise, I think letting him play Mature-rated games is okay because I keep it real and we play together versus letting him play alone. I wouldn't buy him an M-rated game to play in his room by himself. Maybe I am an idiot. What are everyone's thoughts? | *Rcordio, via email*

Every child's maturity level is different so we're not going to condemn any parent for their decisions on what is and isn't appropriate. (Bad daddy! Baaad daddy!) The three games you specifically mention have minimal or no swearing, but steer clear of *Bayonetta* if expletives really concern you—it's got a Penn. Station bathroom-style potty mouth.

WE ARE INCREDIBLY IMMATURE

Every time I get pwned in *Uncharted 2*, my pwner takes my Gold Gun! It really ticks me off! I have been meaning to get a headset to tell them to back off, but I can't find one! Any suggestions on a model? | *Noah Current, via email*

We'll admit it. We totally laughed at "pwner." But go for Sony's official Bluetooth Headset. It does the job and it's a safe choice.

LIKE A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

I hope what Ubisoft did with *Assassins Creed II* does not become a trend. I loved the game, but I feel that Ubisoft pulled one over on me. Back in December, I completed the game to 97 percent completion, which was all that was possible at the time. I have now reached 100 percent completion, but it cost me another $11 to download the rest of the game months after the disc was released in stores. Thanks to DLC, Ubisoft found a way to sell their complete game for $71 instead of just $60. Plus, you have to piece it together by downloading the last part later.

I think DLC is a great way to add extra content to a game, and I have frequently paid for actual extra content. But this is the first time I shelled out money for content that simply completed the original story. I hope the next game I buy is a whole game. I would rather them be honest and sell the game for more money in the first place (if that is what they need to do) rather than lure me in with an incomplete game and then squeeze a few more dollars out of me here and there if I want the whole game or story.
Robert, via email

We definitely agree with you, Robert. It's a matter of perceived value. Had that additional content merely added to the story (or even if it had simply given us more to do in the game), we wouldn't have objected to paying for it. But the fact that the DLC filled in the "corrupted" (massive eye-roll) chapters before the final mission made it feel as though it had been intentionally withheld from the disc. Regardless of whether or not that was the case, it was easy to feel cheated. In the future, we're definitely hoping for a little more *Burnout Paradise* and a little less "corrupted chapters."

4

Number of team lunches shared by PTOM staff this issue

3

Number of episodes of *The Tester* viewed by the staff during lunches

17

Number of jokes made about the state of comedian/*The Tester* judge Hal Sparks' career

PS3VANLGELIST

I work at a well-known movie/video-game rental store. There are a lot of annoying customers that make me very angry. Almost every day, I hear things like, "The movie kept skipping," "My DVD player said it could not read the disc," and "I just bought a new Blu-ray player but this Blu-ray won't play!" I am a proud PS3 owner, and I tell every customer that the PS3 is not only the best gaming console but also the best movie-viewing device. The PS3 laughs at fingerprints and scratches. I am 100-percent certain that if every person owned a PS3, the quality of life for video store employees would greatly increase.
Michael, via email

Et Cetera All the other stuff that distracts PTOM

Crochet Today Magazine | $6.99

Yes, *Crochet Today.* Because after a tough deadline, or a killer boss battle, Gary likes to unwind with a hook and yarn. He's so enamored with his pursuit of this manly art that he's even written a column in the magazine's May/June issue!

Hello | Album | Free!

Local Bay Area band Hard Girls cranks out bittersweet indie rock jams like you wouldn't believe, and its second EP has quickly become one of Scott's favorites. Download it for free from Quoteunquoterecords.com—home of the world's first donation-based record label. If you like it, donate!

Game of Thrones TV show | HBO premium

Winter is coming and Roger's stocking up on knight's gear and thermal undies. HBO's green-lighting of a 10-episode adaptation of George R.R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* might finally get him out of his *Battlestar-Galactica's*-over funk. But it'll be a long, hard winter before the series debuts next spring.

Desktop Tower Defense | Flash Game | Free

A time-guzzling, face-melting extravaganza, Desktop Tower Defense will eat your life. You'll feverishly build fortifications to destroy a series of whatsits. As a certified work avoidance-expert, Greg finds *Desktop Tower Defense* invaluable. Get it at www.handdrawngames.com/DesktopTD/Game.asp.

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